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Signed by Arthur B. Krim on May 1, 1984

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ACCESSION NUMBER 85-07

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 8, 1981
INTERVIEWEE: ARTHUR KRIM
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Mr. Krim's office, New York City

Tape 1 of 1

G: Mr. Krim, let me just begin by asking you to sketch the origin of your friendship with President Johnson. Do you recall the first time you met him?

K: Yes, I do. It all started with a meeting in April of 1962 when he was vice president. I was visiting President Kennedy in order to plan for a birthday salute to President Kennedy at Madison Square Garden in May. I was accompanied by Anna Rosenberg [Hoffman] and Bob Wagner, the then-mayor of New York. When we finished the meeting with President Kennedy, either President Kennedy or Anna Rosenberg, who has had some relationship with then-Vice President Johnson, suggested we go over and say hello to the Vice President. Of course, I had heard of the Vice President, as any American would have, but I had never met him until that day at the Executive Office Building. I can see it now, sitting around the table with Anna and Bob Wagner and the Vice President and myself. He came on very strong in the area of civil rights. He was then the head of some commission that President Kennedy had appointed him to, having to do with civil rights, and he was just full of it.

The meeting lasted about half an hour, not more than that. On the way back to New York I commented both to Bob Wagner and Anna Rosenberg about how the sparks

flew the minute we came into that office. Of course, that was a premonition of things to come.

G: Was he representing a point of view, or was he trying to advance something with the three of you?

K: Yes, he certainly was. You know, these were the early days. This was before there had been any crack in the discrimination patterns in the South. He was talking about how he was determined, working with President Kennedy, to change that, that he was dedicated to it. I forget the name of the committee, but you would probably know it.

G: It was the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee.

K: Yes. Obviously his point of view was very pro-action to do away with restrictions of the past.

Within the next six weeks, we, meaning Anna Rosenberg and myself, as co-chairmen of the event for President Kennedy, programmed two or three preliminary meetings to which we would invite prospective contributors and where we would have somebody from the administration to help stimulate contributions. As a result of that meeting we both felt that we wanted Vice President Johnson to come to New York to help us. We discussed the matter with the man whom we thought was the closest man in New York to Vice President Johnson--Ed Weisl. We found out that Ed and the Vice President hadn't been talking to each other. They had had some quarrel, which you'll have to check in other places, but I believe the source of it was Ed's disagreement with the Vice President's decision in Los Angeles to run for the vice presidency. In any case, to our surprise we found there was this lack of contact, but we also sensed that Ed would

look with favor on a chance to reestablish relations.

This in retrospect might seem to have been a not unusual thing to do, to invite the Vice President here, but it was, because he had a very small cadre of supporters in New York at that time, and in normal course he would not have been a man that we would have called on to widen the support of the New York tribute to President Kennedy. His contacts in New York had been somewhat limited up to that time, certainly from a fund-raising viewpoint. Except for what Ed Weisl might have been able to tell you, were he alive today, there had been little ostensible activity on his behalf in New York. When he had his movement going for the presidency, for instance, if there were meetings in New York, I know I never heard of them, whereas I knew about meetings all the time for Adlai Stevenson and for John Kennedy.

So the second time that I saw the Vice President was when he came up for that meeting, and I sat next to him. The head table consisted of me, and to my right, Vice President Johnson, to his right, Anna Rosenberg. We had about fifty or sixty people at a meeting at one of the hotels, I believe the Waldorf. It's the first time I remember I had my picture taken with the Vice President. It's somewhere in the files; I haven't seen it in years. He made an impassioned plea for help for John Kennedy. You know, when he went out to do something he did it with unqualified enthusiasm, and he certainly let himself go at this meeting on behalf of Kennedy. A little over a year later I remember I had the occasion to think of that when there were doubts expressed just before the Texas visit about whether Johnson was really in his corner or whether Kennedy was really going to select him to make the run for the vice presidency again. It was a total

commitment address, and it helped.

The next time I saw the Vice President was on the evening itself of the tribute to President Kennedy, which would be late May of 1962. The affair was a tremendous success. We had Madison Square Garden filled, and before that we had a successful dinner at the Four Seasons, which was not attended, as I recall, by the Vice President. At Madison Square Garden the Vice President sat, of course, in the distinguished guest box, which at that time included President Kennedy and my wife and myself and Anna Rosenberg and Adlai Stevenson and Mayor Wagner and Jim Farley and a couple of others.

Immediately after the affair we had a party at our home, and that was the first time the Vice President came to our home here in New York. One of the things my wife has had the occasion to mention quite often is that Vice President Johnson was somewhat ignored by a number of people at that party, only because Kennedy was there and a lot of stars, Maria Callas and Marilyn Monroe and, I don't know, thirty or forty stars. Her [my wife's] comment has always been how rapidly things change when the uniform changes. No matter how important or dynamic a vice president may be, in the shadow of the president he is distinctly, you know, given a much lower priority of attention.

But that was an occasion when my wife got to know him a little bit, I less at that time, because I was floating around with a lot of the other guests. The Vice President stayed until one or two in the morning and then left.

None of these meetings up to this time, or in fact up to after the presidency, were personal in any sense, and I'm relating them only to have a certain sequence to my recall.

The next time that I saw the Vice President was when there was a fund raiser in Washington for President Kennedy, which would be January of 1963. After the fund raiser a few of us were invited to the Vice President's home, and that was the first time I met Lady Bird. The Vice President was a terrific host; it was one of those times when he was going around handing out the drinks and everything. I remember Kennedy and Gene Kelly singing some old Irish ballads together. It was fun, and it was the first time I saw LBJ's predilection for dancing. The dancing went on till I think five in the morning. Where was his home again?

G: The Elms.

K: The Elms, yes. I guess from our viewpoint we felt we got to know him a little better. From his viewpoint I think we were just one amongst the many there. There was still nothing personal. But that was the next time we saw him.

Then I think the next time I saw him was in July or August of 1963. My memory may be playing tricks on me here, but I think it was the day that President Kennedy had a luncheon for Julius Nyerere, the head of Tanzania. After the luncheon I paid the President a little visit. We chatted, and when I came out, the Vice President was in the anteroom in one of those typical Johnson persuasive poses--what could you call it? He had Dick Maguire against the wall and he was persuading him. He was talking to him about the Texas visit of the President, and what he had to do about John Connally. At that time it was all a little vague to me, but if you talk to Dick Maguire he could fill you in on that. I know the Vice President was upset about some of the arrangements down there and was trying to straighten Dick out. I just happened to be in the anteroom while

this was going on. So I don't know whether that counts as a contact with the Vice President, but in my memory I remember seeing him then.

Then the next time I saw him he was president. It must have been a few days after he became president. It was the day he was lobbying a wheat bill or something, a grain bill, and the place was a madhouse of people waiting to see him. I was there because I had been called there to discuss the convention. You will probably be able to find the exact day. It was not in the records you sent me.

G: I see it's not here.

K: No, it isn't. But I was there. It was a few days afterward. Jack Valenti saw me in the hall, and it was the first time we had met. He had read all about my partner and myself. My partner was with me in the hall. He was there on something else at that time, and I can't recall what, but I remember Jack talking to the two of us before I saw the President.

The purpose of my meeting and why I had been called--I believe by Walter Jenkins or by Bill Moyers--was to make a decision about the films for the convention. I had been designated by President Kennedy to be in charge of that for him, and we had planned several films and we were well on the way in our planning. I had been working with Ted Sorensen and Kenny O'Donnell on that. Of course they were there at the time I'm talking about, working for President Johnson, and they must have told him about these plans and should they be aborted or what should be done, and the President said, "Bring him in," or something. In any case, I know that I had not solicited the meeting, I was asked to come here.

I was told the purpose of the meeting and so I brought the two fellows with me

who were going to produce the films for President Kennedy. The three of us saw President Johnson. It was a brief meeting. I believe it was attended by Ted Sorensen. And the decision was for us to go ahead with films, but we changed the nature of the films. We decided to do a memorial film on President Kennedy, and to do a biography of President Johnson, and a third film. I remember there were three involved, and I would have to go back to the records to find out what the third film was about. I remember the first two. I think the third film had something to do with the issues that the President would likely be addressing during the campaign.

G: Had the Kennedy film been planned as a biographical film?

K: Yes, but obviously not as a memorial film, and it hadn't started. The decision to do these films for President Kennedy had only been made a week or two before the assassination. At that time I had had a meeting at the White House with the planning staff on both the campaign and the convention. I was at that time informally considered by the Kennedy staff as the media contact for the convention and the coming campaign, as well as to be of help in raising funds for it.

At this first meeting with President Johnson, which was quite brief because the President was really being smothered by a pending grain bill and a large list of appointments, he gave us his go-ahead, and that was it.

Then shortly after that, or maybe around the same time, I addressed a letter--which you do have, I think, in these files--to Bill Moyers or to Jenkins, asking what to do about the President's Club, which by that time was very successful and which I had headed up for President Kennedy. I always felt that the reason I was able to do a

good job on that was because people knew that I knew the President personally and that I was close to Steve Smith and Kenny O'Donnell and the rest of the Kennedy staff, and I suggested that President Johnson move to somebody else who was close to him personally to head it up, that I would help. I thought, for instance, of somebody like Ed Weisl, who incidentally at the time of that Kennedy tribute back in 1962 had repaired his relationship with LBJ and everything was now very close. As a matter of fact, everybody thought of Ed Weisl as President Johnson's man in New York, as indeed he was. But the answer came back--I don't know whether it was in writing or not--"Come down to Washington and talk about it." I went down and I had a luncheon with Bill Moyers and Walter Jenkins. I guess they had heard from Ed Weisl, and they asked me to stay on and do the fund raising in New York and the President's Club for President Johnson.

G: Do you have any insight as to how this decision was made?

K: No. That would have to come from Bill Moyers or Walter Jenkins, or Ed Weisl, if he were alive.

G: The President never in retrospect discussed with you why he had decided to keep you on?

K: Not that I recall. But as a result of that decision I went to work again. I had expected to do this for President Kennedy and I really had not expected to do it for President Johnson after the assassination, because I really thought it needed somebody closer to President Johnson, but when I got this assignment from Moyers and Jenkins, I went to work to do the best I could. I found quite quickly that there were a number of people ready to support President Johnson in a big way who had been ready to do that for President Kennedy. In other words, the cast of supporters changed somewhat, particularly from the

business community, but I soon sensed that on balance we could probably raise more support for President Johnson than for President Kennedy--and this subsequently proved to be the case.

G: Excuse me. Were these people that he had known personally or do you think it was just a question of them. . . ?

K: Well, these were people who had supported Kennedy, but when I mentioned President Johnson, their support was more enthusiastic and more money was involved. If I went through my lists I could remember a number in that category. As an instance, there was a building man in the Bronx, Harry Fischbach, head of a very big building concern that was very close to Charles Buckley, the head of the Bronx establishment, who in turn was very close to Joe Kennedy and in turn protected by John Kennedy against Wagner trying to throw him out. I always thought Fischbach's support of Kennedy was because of Buckley. But when LBJ was president, Fischbach upped his contribution I think from five thousand to a commitment of raising seventy-five thousand. If I went back I could find other instances of that sort.

In any case, as a starter I got a commitment from ten or twelve people, each to be responsible for raising seventy-five thousand. We set a date for one of our what had become rather frequent meetings of the President's Club, to be addressed by the new President in February of 1964. By that time the President's Club had had a history of being exposed to meetings with all the top people in the Kennedy Administration, the members of the cabinet and so forth. Actually we had set up a meeting for the first week of December of 1963 with formal invitations, and Bobby Kennedy was going to be the

principal speaker at the meeting, as well as other members of the administration, which of course was postponed by the assassination. But to keep the fund raising flowing, as soon as I could I rescheduled that kind of a meeting, which we called a seminar, a President's Club seminar, for February, and in order to get the blessing of the new President to appear, I went down to Washington to meet with him. I would place this meeting some time in January. There again, you didn't help me with your records. Actually, as I recall, I had two or three meetings with him in the close space of a couple of weeks. Ted Sorensen was at one or two talking about the convention. But then I remember this meeting, which was one-on-one, just the President and me, and we discussed the fund raising in New York. I showed him a list of people who had given me commitments, and he pooh-poohed a couple of them. He said, "They'll never do it." He was right, I think.

G: Really?

K: Yes. But he could recognize that there was a momentum going. He asked me what I expected of him in New York. I told him that the purpose of these seminars was to permit the members of the President's Club, who had shown financial support in rather substantial ways, to have a give and take with the administration on issues, that we had always had the support of President Kennedy with his cabinet people and others. And Johnson was quick to say we'd have the same support with his top group. I told him I would like him to meet before the seminar with this group that had pledged the seventy-five thousand, and then to address the seminar, and he agreed to do both. He wanted to know more about the format and so forth. He did come up to New York, he had that meeting with the little group. I remember we sat around in his hotel suite. Then

later on in the day he came to the seminar. He made a fine address. I have it someplace.

You must have it. Do you have that?

G: I think we do, but I'll have to check.

Was he effective among these individuals?

K: Yes, he was.

G: Did he ask you in advance for advice on what issues to focus on?

K: Yes, he did. I mean, we always talked about that kind of thing, what's important in New York. I don't have enough of a recollection now to be too specific on how I answered the question at that particular meeting. But yes, of course, that was the purpose of that meeting in the White House. He was very effective at the seminar. I remember I had said something to him and he chided me for it a bit publicly. I can't remember what it was, but it's probably in the minutes of that seminar.

The success of the seminar started the ball rolling in a very healthy way for the fund raiser that we were now planning for President Johnson that we had initially planned for President Kennedy. We had established a kind of annual event for President Kennedy, the first in 1962 and the next in 1963, which we held in May of 1963. We were setting a third one for May of 1964, as a principal fund raiser to start to fill the war chest for the campaign.

One of the things that I had discussed with the President, and also with Moyers and Jenkins, was the whole concept of the President's Club, which was relatively innovative at that time and was based on the fact that the money was being raised for the President and not for the party, and this had to be cleared with President Johnson as a

concept. I might say, I was pushing through an open door because as far as he was concerned that's the way he wanted it, because the money would flow in a way where if the President wanted to help the party or to help senators or congressmen, it would be coming from him and not from the party.

It might be well for me to divert for a minute right now to the history of the President's Club with President Kennedy, because that's what I briefed President Johnson on. I think he had known about it, but not all the ramifications. In 1960 when President Kennedy ran for the presidency he got very little money out of New York, very little, because the head of the state committee, Michael Prendergast, held onto it. During the campaign he held onto it for New York's participation in the campaign. The only money that President Kennedy really saw came from a citizens' committee that was co-chaired by my partner, Bob Benjamin, with Tony Akers, who later became ambassador to Australia. The liaison for President Kennedy was his friend Bill Walton, the artist, who came to New York to be overseer of the campaign for President Kennedy. All of us who were supporting President Kennedy gave our money through the citizens' committee. But even that citizens' committee, to our consternation we found out later, had held back some of the money for local sustenance.

But in any case, it was successful enough so that the fellows around President Kennedy, meaning O'Donnell and Maguire principally, wanted some kind of perpetuation of it where the money would not go to the party, but would go the President directly for his political purposes. That was the origin of that first tribute that we gave to President Kennedy. It was an extension of the citizens' effort of 1960, and I was asked to be

chairman of that along with Anna Rosenberg. The money we raised came to about a million dollars. We had agreed in advance how much of it would go directly to the President. It was a big part of it. We had also agreed to pay off Mayor Wagner's remaining campaign debt, and that was considered by Wagner something the President was doing for him. This entire concept sat so well with President Johnson, when we explained it to him, that he wanted it continued. Do you want to ask some questions on that?

G: I was just going to ask, when the President's Club was formalized, was it initially confined to New York or was it immediately nationwide?

K: It was initially confined to New York. What happened is, after this big success Dick Maguire and I discussed how to keep the cadre interested, the people who had given money. What do we do, so it's not just a one-time thing? They had enjoyed the show at Madison Square Garden--you know, we had an all-star show, some of the greatest performers of our time were in that show. Out of that the germ of the President's Club was born. At the very beginning it was for these New York contributors. But then before the year was out we had done the same thing in California, and we had solicited people in other parts of the country. For those who gave a thousand dollars or more, we anointed them with the designation of the President's Club, and they found themselves invited to a lot of things locally and in Washington. By the time I was able to discuss this with President Johnson, I think we had over two thousand members of the President's Club.

G: This was nationwide?

K: Nationwide, yes. In any case, as I say, President Johnson wanted it continued. During

the course of the next few months I worked closely with the group around President Johnson toward making that May event a success. That's before Marvin Watson's entry into the situation, because after he entered into it, my closest contact was Marvin in the White House. But at that time it was Walter and Bill Moyers and Kenny O'Donnell, who stayed on for this purpose, and for a brief time, Mike [Myer] Feldman. These were holdovers of the Kennedy regime. During that period I met several times with the President, which you don't show on your records, and I don't keep a diary, but I know we discussed the convention and fund raising for the campaign. My meetings with him generally included others from the administration, so you probably have a record of them someplace.

I remember one in particular where we showed the President a rough cut of the film of his life at the White House, and he was generally pleased, but he wasn't pleased with me because he had just heard that I had advised my wife to turn down a certain committee appointment he had given her. He yelled across the room at me, and it was a typical LBJ needle.

G: Do you recall what the appointment was?

K: Yes. It was something that she felt was not right for her--I forget whether it was on beautification or something else--but you know, she's a professional scientist and it wasn't her dish of tea. It was not meant as an insult or a rejection, and frankly, we didn't think the President would know about it. It was one of those things where she felt she could not make a meaningful contribution, so she had rejected it. He really let me have it at that rough-cut screening and I told him that it wasn't a committee in her field of expertise.

So then he came up with another appointment on mental retardation. She accepted that, and that was one of several that she did accept during the administration. I did note that you didn't have any of those meetings in your records that you sent me.

G: Okay. I don't want to get ahead of the narrative but let me just ask you, at any time during these discussions, did you have the impression that he was ambivalent about running again in 1964?

K: No. Of course, I knew about 1968 intimately.

G: Sure. You were there.

K: Yes. But I wasn't yet in any inner circle with the President, although our relationship was friendly. Even that bawling out I always took as a friendly bawling out, particularly in the way he did it before, I guess, thirty people. Actually, as I remember, he was sitting next to Lady Bird, and he didn't address me. He said, "You know that fellow, you know what he did?" I was a few rows back. I was getting a little bit of the Johnson treatment. When I reported that to my wife, she was surprised that the whole thing had reached the presidential level, which we had never anticipated.

But I had other meetings with him about the convention during that time. I remember when he made the decision about the sequence of events. I was at some meeting when it was decided that the Bobby Kennedy introduction of the tribute to John Kennedy would be after the nominations and not before. It had been programmed to be before. Of course I interpreted this as his not wanting a big demonstration ahead of the nomination, particularly since he was--I was about to say somewhat paranoid, but as Henry Kissinger said recently, sometimes paranoids have reason to feel that they're in

jeopardy--apprehensive of Bobby making a last minute push, not for senator but for the vice presidency. I don't think anybody gave much credence to that. Certainly I didn't, but I may be wrong, maybe there was something stirring there.

I think at that period the President might have been a little arm's length from me because I had come out in support of Bobby Kennedy to run for senator. I was part of a small endorsing group and this was front-page news in the New York Times. Ed Weisl called me to say, "You know, I think the President is not going to look with favor on that." I told Ed Weisl that I had called Bill Moyers and asked him, "Do you see anything wrong with my doing this?" and Bill had said, "No, you go right ahead and do it." So there was a little difference of opinion on that.

But that's later. I still want to come back to the fact that we had a successful fund raiser in May for President Johnson. That was one of the occasions that I recall which led in a little way to the bond that ultimately developed between us. Because before the dinner at, I believe, the Americana or the Hilton, one of those hotels, we had a very intimate group for a drink which included besides myself and my wife, I believe Mayor Wagner and Lady Bird and possibly one or two others. But it was a small group and we sat around drinking and chatting. I remember the talk was basically about Vietnam. I was very untutored in that area and I was asking questions of the President about something which in retrospect seems so highly unsophisticated that I hesitate even to mention it, but I will, because I remember talking about the possibility of our joining with the Russians, who didn't want other influences to prevail there, to accomplish a quick settlement.

G: This was when the feeling was that the primary force was Red China.

K: Yes. So you recall that? In retrospect it seems naive, but I remember talking with President Johnson about that, and his pointing out that it couldn't work.

Then we had the dinner. He went around every table, which had been a practice started by President Kennedy back in 1962. At that time it was kind of unprecedented. It was the first time a president had done that. And he met all the big contributors in New York, many of them for the first time. I remember he met a couple of members of my family at one of the tables, just in passing, and then after I introduced them he went on and then went back and said something very complimentary about what I had done to make this a success. Of course, to my family that led to a glow. He was very good at that.

Then we went to Madison Square Garden and had a successful show again, with big talents involved, the same group in many respects that later came to the party at his inauguration. I forget whether [Rudolf] Nureyev was there at that one or just at the other one, but [Harry] Belafonte and a whole--you know, you have those names, a high-class group that we had put together.

G: Did you contact these people yourself?

K: With Richard Adler. Some of them I had to get, others he got. He was more responsible for the show; I had nothing to do with the production of the show. I had contacted several of the performers and used whatever influence I had to get them there. I think Woody Allen was at this one. It was a good group and very successful.

G: I just want to ask you about your general impressions here about the mixing of politicians

and, say, people from Broadway to Hollywood, stars. How did they seem to mesh together?

K: Well, those stars who decided to make political statements meshed very well with the political leaders. As you know, all political leaders and presidents have gone out of their way to invite them as background color in functions at the White House. I always felt an easy rapport between the two groups, and that of course includes President Johnson in a big way. He had made some very staunch friends amongst the Hollywood stars and others in that world. But that will come later in the narrative.

After the show at Madison Square Garden, where the President made gracious remarks, everybody came to my home again. Now, of course, the President was the center of attention, the contrast was fantastic. A very distinguished group came there, both from the money and the show arena. I've often wondered at the impact it had on Johnny Carson, who was there, because he mentioned it several times as much as ten years after--yes, ten years after the event--"when I met President Johnson at this party," and so forth. It was a crowded, successful topping off of a successful evening. I remember he left to go to Texas around one in the morning, with effusive thanks. So that was a little more personal than any of my prior meetings with President Johnson.

The convention was the next event. At the convention I was chairman of various affairs that Lady Bird [attended]. I escorted Lady Bird to a number of meetings and introduced her and their daughters to the President's Club constituents. Hubert Humphrey joined us. The President didn't go to those meetings.

G: Did you have any insight in the selection of Hubert Humphrey?

K: You know, I've been thinking of that as we've been talking and I know that he discussed that with me, and I'm trying to remember the occasions. He talked to me shortly after that famous meeting in which he said nobody in his cabinet would be the vice presidential nominee. I remember having a talk with him on this. I was a little disappointed that you didn't have records of those talks, because I'm sure I was there shortly after that. But I don't think it was a personal meeting; I think there were other people in the room. At that time I do remember his saying how Hubert Humphrey was hungering after the job, and that he's overdoing it, and he got angry with people pressuring him on Hubert Humphrey's behalf. I remember being in conversations about this. But not being able to pinpoint it, I sort of passed over it. But yes, I do remember that I always felt it was going to be Hubert Humphrey but he was getting angrier by the minute at people lobbying him for Hubert Humphrey.

G: I gather he didn't want the decision made for him, he wanted--

K: That's right. And I also remember being in Atlantic City when Arthur Schlesinger came to me and said, "It's going to be Senator [Thomas] Dodd and there's going to be all hell to pay," because Dodd had been called to the White House. So I wasn't privy to the final decision.

And when the President came to Atlantic City I only had a formal moment with him, but I saw a lot of Lady Bird and Hubert Humphrey and the two girls because we went around to the different functions together. I don't know, did he go back or what? I just don't remember seeing very much of him after the speech that he made to the convention.

G: I'm not sure. I'd have to [check].

K: Then after that we pitched in to a new fund-raising effort, of which I was the chairman, although I think I brought in a close friend of the President's to be the official chairman, Don Cook. Don never really blossomed in that area of fund raising, but he was very close to the President at that time. As the years went on, I noticed that that did not continue as a close relationship, but you probably have interviewed Don. Don has a history of closeness preceding the presidency, more when he was with the SEC.

G: 1943, when he was with that [Naval Affairs] committee.

K: Yes. But I must say that during the years of my kind of family relationship with the President, Don didn't play much of a role. But at this time I thought of Don as being very close to the President, and he did play some function in this campaign. It was a successful fund-raising campaign. We used the Vice President and so forth. I guess we raised more money than any other single constituency around the country.

G: I think the list of the New York members of the President's Club for that year was published in the Congressional Record for something.

K: That was the Texas Club. Are you sure it was New York?

G: Yes. Four columns, single-spaced, fine print, and it just goes on for pages and pages, and you wonder how Goldwater got any money at all in that election.

K: Well, we really took the money out.

G: What was the system that you used for getting that much money in New York?

K: Well, the system was very simple. Number one, to appeal to the fact that it really makes a difference for a Democrat to be in the White House, and the traditional appeal for those

who support the idea of a government taking care of those in need, the opposite of what elected President Reagan in 1980. I mean, this was the appeal to people--and many of them wealthy--who felt the system would survive only if you take care of those who haven't been able to take care of themselves.

G: But did you contact only the people that you knew personally, or was there some organized procedure for tapping them?

K: Oh, yes. We had a top group of maybe thirty people that would meet every week, and we would go through cards and assign cards. We had a network of people making the contacts that covered a lot of ground. And by that time it was well known to a number of them that there were rewards, if you will, that came with membership in the President's Club. Such rewards I can say without qualification being of a nonvenal nature. I don't hesitate to say that it didn't get you a favor with the government, but it got you an awful lot of fun for yourself and a feeling of being close to the charisma of power. You know, the kind of things that I'm talking about are--and it had started with Kennedy--such things as an occasional invitation to a state dinner or, more often, an appointment to a commission overseeing Annapolis or the fisheries. I never knew there were so many commissions until I got into this and had the function of--between Ed Weisl and myself--making recommendations. Also, missions abroad. You know, right now we have this [Anwar] Sadat [funeral] mission. During this period, if there were a funeral or an inauguration of a president, several of our constituents would be on that plane hobnobbing with the officials from the administration.

G: Sure, a largely honorary [function].

K: Only honorary.

G: Do you think that there was a percentage of President's Club members who gave to both parties just sort of as a hedge or simply to have some sort of entre in either case?

K: I think there was some of that but very little. But if you were to ask the question another way the answer would be different. And that is, did the same group support Nixon. Many of them did after he became president. There was a kind of standing job between President Johnson and myself because there were occasions where I would have boasted of a ten thousand dollar contribution from somebody who subsequently gave Nixon seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. We were living with a different level. The President considered ten thousand a substantial contribution; Nixon thought of it as a cup of coffee.

G: Small potatoes.

K: In any case, to stay with the sequence, the next meeting that I remember so vividly with the President was the Saturday before the election. The New York State Committee or the city committee, I forget which, under Jerry Finkelstein, chaired a rally at Madison Square Garden. I came there with a good friend of the President's, Andre Meyer. I just came as a spectator really, but we sat in the front row, and when the President finished his speaking he was with Jack Valenti on the platform and Jack saw me in the front row and motioned me over. I went on the stage and I was overwhelmed by the reception because the President lifted me up and embraced me and kissed me on both cheeks. I had nothing to do with that particular event. It was such a show of affection. That happened many times between us later, but that was the first time. Jack was beaming, he was very pleased because Jack had apparently told him how much I had done toward raising the

money for the campaign. That was a very warm moment. Later I went to a party that the President was supposed to come to, at Jerry Finkelstein's place, but he didn't show.

Then came the election. I was not in Texas for this election; I was at a New York meeting, a dinner hosted by Ed Weisl. Within a few minutes we knew--and of course had anticipated--that it would be a runaway election. I don't think I made any personal contact with the President. I certainly wrote him a letter or sent him a wire. We had all kind of expected it, so it didn't come as any surprise.

One of the things that had happened during the campaign that I forgot was that Ed Weisl and I organized a trip of some of the big contributors, about twenty of them, in a private plane to the White House. And the President met us in the living quarters, the Yellow Room. It was a time when I think Lady Bird was on the southern tour, and he was very proud of that. He thanked us all, and he was particularly pleased with Ed Weisl, not with me. But then he said something which indicated that he thought that I had been there before, and I had never been in the living quarters. Because he said, "Arthur, take the group, show them around, you know." I was lost. So I asked Ed Weisl to do it instead, because I didn't know the Lincoln Room from the Oval Office at that time. Later it became almost like a second home, but at that time I didn't know those quarters.

Then the next recollection I guess is at the inauguration. I was invited to some meeting, I forget which one, and I couldn't go to the first event at which President Johnson was listed to appear, but my wife went, and the next day there were pictures all over the world of the President dancing with Mathilde. I kept getting letters from my branch managers in Australia, enclosing copies of the pictures, also in Europe and Africa.

You probably know the picture. It was flashed all over the world the day after that party that I missed.

Either that night or the night before, I was chairman of the inauguration party for the President and Vice President at the convention hall, where we had a wonderful show. I know Nureyev performed and others. As chairman I introduced the President and the Vice President. The President did not show at a private party later, much to the chagrin and obvious annoyance of, I believe, it was Mrs. [Morris] Cafritz, who gave the party. The cast showed up. The President was tired I believe. John Bailey had officially escorted him that night, and I was the official escort for Hubert Humphrey. I forget what night that was, whether it was before or after this other event.

But the next thing that happened was that my wife and I were in the front row at the inaugural parade opposite the receiving stand. Midway in the parade one of the Secret Service fellows came over and said, "The President would like you to join him." So we went over and stood with him in the enclosure for twenty minutes or a half an hour. I used to have some pictures of Hubert Humphrey and the President and myself, but I don't see them here. And of course we were very complimented by that. I don't think we saw him after that at the inauguration.

G: Let me ask you one campaign question that we passed over. The President appeared with Robert Kennedy in that [campaign], didn't he, in 1964 here in New York?

K: I do not know.

G: I thought that he did come up and have an appearance.

K: The time I know about when they said nice things about each other was something that I

negotiated, and that was in 1967. That comes later in the story. Am I going into too much here?

G: No. Not at all. Not at all.

K: Because this is a question of just recalling as I'm talking.

In 1965, after the inauguration, I was still wearing this uniform of head of the President's Club. During that period I kept getting word through Watson and early on from Maguire before he left, that the President wanted me to be treasurer of the national committee, and I rejected that. I didn't want to get into a legal line of fire. But I did agree to be chairman of the National Finance Committee. That came somewhat after the affair I was preparing for May of 1965 to keep the annual event idea going. We decided not to go for another Madison Square Garden Show, but to have a show and dinner at the Waldorf limited to the members of the President's Club.

As I recall it we had another very successful evening. I sat with Mrs. Johnson, and the President sat across the way with Mary Lasker and my wife. By that time we had structured the New York President's Club to have Bobby Lehman as chairman of the event--he was a very prestigious addition to our muscle for the occasion--and Mary Lasker as co-chairman. I remained as chairman for the country and also did most of the work on the affair. We had a preliminary meeting at Bobby Lehman's home, and we had meetings at other places, and a lot of work went on in that period and I know the President had reports on all the activities from Marvin particularly.

Things got hairy for the President and I forget on what issues, but I know they were hairy enough for me to say to Marvin, "Look, maybe he shouldn't take the time to

come to New York for this fund raiser. We can get most of the money without the event." The answer came back, "He definitely wants to do it." I'm trying to recall as I'm talking what it was. It might have been Vietnam, because Vietnam was heating up a lot during that period.

G: What was the date here?

K: April of 1965, and May. Of course, he made his big decision on Vietnam in July of 1965, but this was after the Mac Bundy mission, and in that period. But I think you'll find a letter that I sent to Marvin Watson suggesting the possibility of raising the money without his coming.

Do you have his speech in there to the seminar in February of 1964, in the President's papers?

G: I think we do. I'll send it to you. I'll check this.

You had the Dominican crisis in April of 1965.

K: Yes. Actually the Dominican crisis was on his mind very much that night. The reason I know that is that--well, I'll tell you now. It was a nice evening, and the President was noticeably pleased with it. I came over to his table, we talked, and he said he'd love to have Mary Lasker and Mathilde come down to the White House to visit him, because he was going to have Barbara Ward there. So a couple of days later they went down, and my wife told me the main topic was the Dominican Republic. It was my wife's first visit in the White House. Actually she beat me to it, staying over there with Mary, and came back full of presents. I had autographed pictures and fountain pens and letters. LBJ had loaded her down with mementos and thank yous and so forth, and had told her that he

wanted very much for the two of us to come down with him to Camp David. So obviously this was a kind of watershed on the personal level. From that date forward things became quite personal and family-like, starting, I would say, in June or July. What was the date we went to Camp David?

G: Let's see.

K: Was it June or July? Or August it could be.

G: Here it is. Excuse me. August 6.

K: August, yes. Let me just carry on a bit, because the next thing that happened was an odd thing, and that is, my wife was showing a film at our house on her work, a film on cell structure, and she had a rather distinguished little group of scientists there, including the president of Sloan-Kettering, Frank Horsfall, who was her boss. The phone rang, and I got on, and it was the President. He said he wanted Mathilde to leave that night to go to Paris with the astronauts. I said, "Well, you know, she's here with the President of Sloan-Kettering--" He said, "Put him on the phone." Mathilde went downstairs where we were showing the film and said to Horsfall, "The President wants to talk to you." He said, "President of what?" She said, "The President of the United States." The guy got so flustered, and he went upstairs, and Johnson twisted his arm--it didn't take much twisting. He said he wanted Mathilde to leave right away, and Horsfall said, "But certainly, of course."

So then we had to look up the [flight schedules]. This was eleven at night, and he wanted her there that night to leave the next morning. So we found a plane that left Newark, I think, at one o'clock, and I took her to the plane. But meanwhile, the President

got on the phone with me, and the conversation is one I'll never forget, because he got on and he said, "Your old friend Tom is here." I didn't have the slightest idea who Tom was. He puts Tom on, and it's Tom Dewey, who I didn't know. Tom said, "Arthur, great to talk to you," you know, a politician making out as if we were old friends. I didn't know the guy from Adam, except by reputation obviously, he'd been governor of our state and ran for president and everything else. Then he put Hubert on. The whole thing became a half-hour conversation on the phone between all of us. It was a very jovial night for him. He had the astronauts there, and he was telling me his plans for them--while Mathilde was getting ready. She was already packing. It seems the Russians had just announced they were sending their leading astronauts to the air show starting the next day in Paris and he was countering with our astronauts to show our flag.

G: Did he indicate why he wanted Mrs. Krim to go along?

K: Yes, of course. He was very blunt about it. He said, "These ladies, they don't know how to dress, they don't know how to act, and Mathilde with her sophistication and her knowledge of French would be able to shepherd them. This is probably their first trip to France. We're scurrying around now trying to get them some clothes, but they'll have to have somebody like Mathilde to break them into the scene." He wanted her to accompany Hubert in shepherding them, and of course Mathilde is fluent in French; it's one of her first languages. Also she does have taste, and he knew that. So that was the reason he put in talking to us.

Mathilde was there by two-thirty in the morning. The car met her at the airport. She told me when she got there she was put in Queen Victoria's room, a lovely room

which later we did stay in a couple of times. The President had stayed awake to greet her. Within an hour and a half she was awakened to be on the plane. She enjoyed the experience tremendously, and of course she was a great help. She really took care of them there and saw that they bought the right clothes and broke the ice and took the astronauts around. She had a lot of fun, including episodes of trying to hide from the press so the astronauts and their wives could go to certain places privately. She came back full of it.

A week or so later I was at a dinner at the White House for businessmen, I believe. Lady Bird came over and asked me how Mathilde had enjoyed it, and I told her. Either then or at some political meeting we had at the White House in the Fish Room, the President said to me, he wants me to come to Camp David, and he gave instructions to Jack Valenti or somebody, the next time he goes to Camp David to be sure to invite Mathilde and me. And that invitation did follow, and we accepted. And the first time I slept in the White House was the night we came back from Camp David, a couple of nights later.

G: What do you recall about the time at Camp David?

K: A lot. I was going to ask you, can we do this at the next session, because this is the start of the close relationship. The weekend at Camp David was an extraordinary weekend for me, including the fact that we stayed up all night with the President. You may have gotten a report of that night from other people there, which included John Chancellor, Vicky McCammon [McHugh], and two reporters, Marianne Means and Cissy Morrissey.

G: The reporters? Well, I can find out, surely.

K: Yes.

G: Well, shall we break here then?

K: I'd like to break.

G: Well, this is a good [stopping point].

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]