



“Our Friendship Was Never Severed”

Date: 1968-03-31
Conversation: WH6803-06-12853
Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson
Participant: Abigail Q. McCarthy
Participant: Lady Bird Johnson
Start Time: 22:11
Duration: 03:10
Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: On the night of 31 March 1968, President Johnson stunned the nation by announcing that “I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president.” Later that evening, Johnson took a poignant call from Abigail Q. McCarthy, the wife of Sen. Eugene J. “Gene” McCarthy [DFL–Minnesota], one of Johnson’s key challengers for the nomination. Lady Bird Johnson briefly joined the call.

White House Operator: —on the line, ma’am.

President Johnson: Hello?

Abigail Q. McCarthy: Hello?

President Johnson: Yes?

McCarthy: Mr. President?

President Johnson: Yes.

McCarthy: This is Abigail McCarthy.

President Johnson: Oh, Abigail, how are you?

McCarthy: I am fine, Mr. President, but I am overcome with emotion, really. I don’t see how you could have done this.

President Johnson: [*speaking softly*] Well, I just thought we had to do it, because there’s so much at stake that one little person like me doesn’t—

McCarthy: You know you aren’t one little person, Mr. President.

President Johnson: [*Slight chuckle.*] Well, I've got nine months now to do nothing except—I won't spend one moment doing anything except trying to find peace, and I thought that I—it was—I just thought I had to do it.

McCarthy: Well, I just want to tell you, you have my affection and respect, and I want you to tell Lady Bird [Johnson] how much I love her.

President Johnson: I surely will, dear, and I think it's awfully nice of you to call.

McCarthy: Well, I'm just—you know, I can hardly talk.

President Johnson: Well . . .

McCarthy: I mean, I remember another time like this with Mr. [Harry S.] Truman. And, Mr. President, really, that was—you know, it—it's just shocked us to our [*slight chuckle*] feet here, you know?

President Johnson: Everything—everything will be better, and we'll have a lot of time to devote to what's really important. And after 37 years, you learn what is important. And the—I've just—I—

McCarthy: You know, Mr. President—you know, basically our friendship was never severed.

President Johnson: I hope not. I hope not.

McCarthy: And—

President Johnson: I don't want it to be.

McCarthy: And you do, please—[Eugene J.] Gene [McCarthy] [DFL—Minnesota] isn't here. He's in another town, and I can't reach him right now, but he'd be on the line, too. And I do want you to tell Lady Bird how I feel, won't you?

President Johnson: I sure will. I'll let you talk to her. Wait just a second.

End of excerpt 1.

Lady Bird Johnson: Hello?

McCarthy: Bird?

Lady Bird Johnson: Yes!

McCarthy: It's Abigail.

Lady Bird Johnson: Yes!

McCarthy: I'm in Milwaukee [Wisconsin]. And I'm just so shaken, I don't know what to do. But I just wanted to tell you that I remember the time we were [*unclear*], you know? And . . .

Lady Bird Johnson: [*Laughs.*] Well, it's simply a matter of—I know that this takes 18 hours a day as it is, and still all's not done that you want to get done.

McCarthy: I know.

Lady Bird Johnson: And it is not possible to add on the hours and the days that primaries would take or a campaign would take and do the fair job—the great job—that this place deserves.

McCarthy: I know that.

Lady Bird Johnson: So one has to make a choice.

McCarthy: I know it, Bird, and I hope you understand how I feel. I just—

Lady Bird Johnson: Well, you're sweet to call. And particularly, when you have boys out there, [*slight chuckle*] when you feel pretty darn close to all 500,000 of them and hear from a whole lot of them—

McCarthy: I know.

Lady Bird Johnson: —and you're just about to get two out there yourself [Patrick J. "Pat" Nugent and Charles S. "Chuck" Robb], you don't think much about politics. [*Chuckles.*]

McCarthy: I know that, and—and I just think it's, you know, very noble. And I just wanted you to know how I feel about it.

Lady Bird Johnson: Well, thank you for calling, and I think you're sweet to do it.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: "Lyndon B. Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson, and Abigail Q. McCarthy on 31 March 1968," Conversation WH6803-06-12853, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Johnson Telephone Tapes: 1968, ed. Kent B. Germany, Nicole Hemmer, and Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4005983>

This conversation was transcribed by the [Miller Center's Presidential Recordings Program](#) with the generous support of the [National Historical Publications and Records Commission](#).

Full information about this conversation: ["Our Friendship Was Never Severed"](#)