

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER 18

Interview with  
Wick Fowler  
May 23, 1968

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. E. Dale Odom

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Approved: Wick Fowler

Date: Aug. 31, 1968

Oral History Collection

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Dr. Odom: This is E. Dale Odom on May 23, 1968, interviewing Mr. Wick Fowler in my office in Denton, Texas. Mr. Fowler, I'd like to ask you for this record to give us a sort of brief biography of your life at least up to...oh, up to the 1940's to '50's thereabouts--your birth and schooling and early career and so on. We'd like to have it on this particular tape.

Mr. Fowler: Well, I'd say offhand I was born in East Texas in a place called Big Sandy. My father was then a lawyer. I was reared in a place called Victoria down in Southwest Texas and went to two high schools there. There was a public school and a Catholic school. Played football on Friday afternoon for the high school and Saturdays for the junior college. Didn't have enough people to make a team. And I was there on...let me see, I think it was '25...it was '25 it opened. I was in high school when they opened it.

Dr. Odom: It was in conjunction with the high school at that time when you played?

Mr. Fowler: They didn't have enough players so they'd make us play Friday

and Saturday. And I left there about 1930 and went to Austin, the University, a couple of years. Then I got a job on an Austin newspaper. I knew very little about newspapering then. I tried to study it on my own, and the depression was very bad and the job played out. And I went to Europe on a freighter for winter. I was in Germany when Hitler came into power. It was quite exciting. I came back on a newspaper. Then I became a policeman there to study police reporting. I was going to stay six months, and I stayed two years, wound up as detective. And I made...you know ten times as much as you could make on a newspaper. I went back to the newspaper and later went with the Highway Patrol chasing after people up and down the highways on a motorcycle.

Odom: Were you a detective...you found out. Was this with the Austin Police force?

Fowler: Yes. Yes.

Odom: I see.

Fowler: And they used me as kind of a college-looking kid to bait people, stuff like that. Undercover work.

Odom: Yes. I see.

Fowler: And I was in the Highway Patrol two years. And I then I was... went with the Dies committee on...on Un-American Activities. I traveled some...with Congressman Dies all over the country for about three years.

Odom: This is when he conducted investigations and you travelled with him.

Fowler: Yes. And it was quite an experience.

Odom: I suppose so.

Fowler: I went with the International News Service covering the legislature in Austin. In early '43 I went with the Dallas News. They were shorthanded and desperate so I got a job.

Odom: What were you doing there?

Fowler: Reporter. And six months later they sent me to cover World War II in Europe, and I stayed over there about a year and a half and went to the Pacific and covered the last eight months of it.

Odom: Let me interject one question there. I thought on your war correspondence career we might get you just while we're doing this interview to briefly tell us where you served, what actions you reported and so on in World War II, and later, and in case, if you agreed, we could perhaps do another interview pointed more specifically at your war reporting career.

Fowler: Well, I joined the Texas 36th Division in Italy, and mainly covered Texans. And I went through north of Rome with them, and the invasion of southern France in '44, and went with them up into Germany. I left and came back in six weeks and went accredited to the Navy--Guam and Okinawa campaigns, and covered the surrender on the Missouri. And three of us went down to Hiroshima, the first people in there to cover the...what the bombing had done. We came back, and became a roving columnist with the news; covered things like the Texas City disaster and...very much like a war.

Odom: Did...when you were in Europe and the Far East as a war correspondent, who else were you working for besides the News, or were you working....

Fowler: News only.

Odom: Or were you working specifically for the News?

Fowler: The News was the first paper sent anybody out from Texas. And... only the News...and of course, I made close to 600 speeches on the situation. They sent me out on assignments for that, mainly because the speeches didn't cost the audience anything. Then I left the News and went with Governor Shivers in 1950. Stayed with him through that campaign year, and I became managing editor of the Midland Reporter Telegram in 1951 and '52...Then came back to Shivers as an executive assistant for three years.

Odom: This was from '52 to '55?

Fowler: '55. Then I went with the Dallas Times Herald on special assignments for a couple of years. And then went with Senator William A. Blakley, who was not a senator then.

Odom: Yes. This was before he had gotten into politics....

Fowler: Before he was appointed to the Senate by Governor Shivers...

Odom: At the time he was appointed to the Senate you went to work for him.

Fowler: Yes. I went back to the Department of Public Safety for a year, reorganizing their Public Information Bureau. Then I came back with Blakley at Dallas when he ran for the Senate. I stayed with him in Washington about three months, a place which I was

glad to get out of. And he ran again. And in '62 I went back to the Dallas News as a special assignment reporter. And after the assassination of President Kennedy, they sent me to Washington for several months to cover the White House. And in '65 I moved back to Austin, later left the News and went with the Denton Record Chronicle. And in that year we worked out a thing...a deal to go to Vietnam. That was the smallest paper in the world that ever sent anybody outside of the country.

Odom: That's what I read. But I...

Fowler: And I spent the winter over there and came back and since then I started the chili business before I left, the Two Alarm Chili, which grew out of so many requests to the Chili Appreciation Society for our recipes. We couldn't fill all of them.

Odom: Well, I think that gives us a pretty good brief outline that we might want to work in quite a few questions on perhaps and make some of them a focus for an interview. I, of course, have been intending to ask you one of the questions was, were you associated with any politicians before you went to work for Governor Shivers, and you did answer that question that you worked for the Dies Committee. In what capacity did you work for Mr. Dies in these investigations?

Fowler: Well, I did investigating work plus travelling with him over the country when he had hearings at different places. And there were eight investigators then for the committee...

Odom: You were one of eight then...

Fowler: And two of us travelled with him all the time. At that time

there was pretty much of a feuding all the time with the administration.

Odom: I see.

Fowler: And they were mad because we didn't jump on more Nazi groups. And finally in Chicago one night we raided about thirteen Nazi hangouts with the police. But you see, the Dies committee had a hard time staying in office, so to speak.

Odom: They had a hard time keeping appropriations....

Fowler: Yes. Sometimes we would wait two or three months for paychecks because they wouldn't appropriate any money. Dies said in all of his speeches that the only weapon we had against Communism and subversive movements was publicity--no law covered them. And he could hardly go to bed at night without having some statement jumping on the Attorney General. (Chuckle)

Odom: Did you work for Mr. Dies on this to a certain extent because you believed in the work he was doing, because the fascination, that is, the excitement of it or why....?

Fowler: I think the interest...I knew so little about it when I went to work for him, but I had been assigned to the committee when it came to Texas as liaison between the state police and the committee. And I raided the Communist headquarters in Houston, picked up all the material on the operation on the University of Texas campus and all the organizations; we had quite a feud about that. They had quite an organization out there. And...

Odom: This is at the University of Texas?

Fowler: Yes. And mainly...

Odom: When was this? What year are you talking about?

Fowler: '39. 1939. And mainly because the pay was so much better. And I got to see...I travelled in about 35 states--got to see the country at government expense, and it was very interesting. But, having known some Communists real well, I talked to them a lot and got some idea of what they were after. And it sort of burns me up the way we were putting up with them, because they were trying to take over everything...

Odom: So, as you worked in this, you did become, philosophically, very interested in...

Fowler: Yes. I was very opposed to what they were doing and how they were misleading people over here. And more so since then, since I've learned more about them.

Odom: Would you like to give us your impression of Mr. Dies as you remember him in this work?

Fowler: Well, he was quite firm and very tough at times. He was not afraid of anything. He apparently believed in what he was doing. He was a tremendous orator. He made speeches all over the country and would talk an hour and five minutes and just kept the audiences spellbound. He was one of the old school of orators. And he had a good sense of humor along with it, and I can't be around anybody who doesn't have a sense of humor (chuckle), not for any length of time. And his father was a Congressman before him, a very big man. In fact, he was telling about his father making a political speech and somebody challenged him in the audience, he'd get mad, and he would go



out and fight this person and come back and finish his speech and pick up where he left off.

Odom: He told us about that on his interview with us.

Fowler: Did he?

Odom: And I certainly agree with you that he is an orator...

Fowler: He is that.

Odom: It came through on the tape, because he gets that microphone and he filibusters. (chuckle)

Fowler: Oh, yes.

Odom: Not much you can do to stop him. He likes to talk.

Fowler: It was a very interesting period of time, because in those days the money was so scarce and you get out...you know, I went to Europe on this ship. I left Texas and landed back in Texas, I had never been out of the state. I'd been to four or five foreign countries, but I'd never been out of Texas into another state until I went with him.

Odom: Travelling and....

Fowler: And it was very interesting.

Odom: Who else were you associated with in that--some of the people who were with you in these investigations?

Fowler: Bill Stripling was the chief clerk of the committee and some of the names I've forgotten; I just worked more or less along with him. But Stripling was the leading man in the Hiss, Alger Hiss case later. But it was such a small operation then.

Odom: How did you go about this method of investigating? In other words, practically, did you get orders that you were to investi-

gate certain things? Just how did...how did you approach this?

Fowler: We worked very closely with local police.

Odom: I see.

Fowler: They had the information locally. And we would go through this information and subpoenae these people and hold hearings before the Dies committee.

Odom: I see. You were...

Fowler: Yes. And the police worked very close with us on this.

Odom: I just wondered how you went about...

Fowler: They knew the local operations themselves, where they were and who was involved.

Odom: Do you think the Communist party was a more active organization at that time than it was today?

Fowler: It was much more open then, more active now, of course, that it's infiltrating numerous organization. They don't identify themselves as Communists moving in; they move in with their philosophy. And, of course, Dies had a good many threats and things like that and people like Lyndon Johnson wouldn't vote for his appropriations. They just didn't vote at all. And President Roosevelt didn't like the set up. Homer Cummings, the Attorney General, was in a feud all the time with him about this. Later Dick Nixon became a member of the committee. He was in Congress.

Odom: Yes, that was after the war wasn't it?

Fowler: Yes.

Odom: You didn't have any association with the movement officially

after World War II, did you?

Fowler: No, not at all.

Odom: How did you...let's see, when you left Mr. Dies then, I believe you said you went to work for the Dallas Morning News.

Fowler: No, I went to work down there for International News Service covering the capital.

Odom: Was that at the time...was the committee terminated at that time?

Fowler: No, I just left it.

Odom: You just left it. Was there any particular reason?

Fowler: Well, I've already said, since then I've had a horror of being found in an alley with a five year pin on.

Odom: I see.

Fowler: And it's always better pay it seems like and more interesting work, and I believe in enjoying life. And I'm not one of these...I just hate the thought of retiring. I've retired many times, I think. I just hate to look forward to that gold watch.

Odom: So, you just tried to find something else.

Fowler: Well, newspaper's my first love. If one of those things open up better well, I get back into it.

Odom: When did you first become acquainted with Allan Shivers and how did your relationship with him begin?

Fowler: Well, he was in the Senate when I was covering for International News Service before the war.

Odom: In Texas.

Fowler: Then I knew him in France; he was in the army in civic affairs over there. And he came back...and there was a move on in Texas

to get me to run for the lieutenant governor when I came back from the war.

Odom: To get you to run for lieutenant governor?

Fowler: Yes. And I stopped it fast, and he was running.

Odom: Is this when Boyce House ran against him in 1946? I guess wasn't it?

Fowler: Governor Allred and some other people got together and tried to get me to run. I had a knee operation from a bombing in Europe in '46, and Shivers came by the hospital announced he was running. So I paid his filing fee.

Odom: You did?

Fowler: With his money.

Odom: You worked for him, then, I suppose some degree in his first campaign for the lieutenant governor.

Fowler: No, I did write him a letter wishing him the best of luck, and he had it printed on a post card and sent it to every voter in Dallas County, and I almost got fired from my job.

Odom: Did you really?

Fowler: For sending it out. But luckily Felix McKnight, my assistant managing editor okayed it.

Odom: This is when you were working for the Dallas News.

Fowler: Dallas News. We weren't supposed to engage in politics. I didn't know about this post card. They sent it out to all the voters in Dallas County.

Odom: You're pretty strict on this working for any political candidate then.

Fowler: Yes. I've turned down a number since, including this campaign because the work is too hard and...

Odom: Then the first actually really full-fledged campaign you got involved in would be the Allan Shivers campaign in 1950, and what position did you...or what was your function?

Fowler: Well, I traveled with him and set the schedules and retained all the information needed on the trip. For example, when you're traveling with somebody like the governor, we travel...we worked eighty-five hours a week average, we figured out. For every weekend or during the week, when we were gone some place where he was speaking. And you carried all the information with you. That's for the people who are supporters of his in the area where you're going, the friends, and the copy of the speech, and thirty minutes before the plane lands you give this folder to him, and he studies it. And when he gets off of the plane, he knows exactly where we're going, what we're going to do, and who we're going to see, and things like that. And you check in and out of the hotel and do all that and everything like that. It's very important.

Odom: And plan the itinerary and all.

Fowler: Everything...And get the airplane and...you might have seen that column. He didn't care what kind of weather it was, and I did care.

Odom: Yes, I saw that column.

Fowler: Yes. I go up to the pilot and say, "What does the weather look like?" And he would say, "Maybe we can make it." And I would

go back to the Governor and say, "Governor, we can't make it. Cancel out."

Odom: Was your decision to go to work for Mr. Shivers in 1950...was it sort of like the same one you made to leave the Dies committee?

Fowler: Exactly, and there was much more money involved, and I like money. I like to blow it in. You know there's a lot of things you can spend money for.

Odom: How does a fellow, say in a position like yours...how does he get paid? On a campaign like that? Paid weekly, by the job? Monthly, or how?

Fowler: Get all your expenses plus a monthly pay check.

Odom: Monthly pay check. And are you hired just for a specific period during a campaign?

Fowler: Until the campaign's over.

Odom: Apparently a good many newsmen seem to get into positions like this, don't they?

Fowler: They work, these PR men in a campaign work for a flat fee. And for five or ten thousand dollars a campaign for a flat fee.

Odom: Let me ask you a few general questions about public relations in politics because you know a good bit about that angle of it. Could you say...Well, you only know from your own experience this question, but you also might care to comment on what might be the reactions of other public relations men. Could you work for a candidate with whom you weren't politically compatible?

Fowler: Oh, no, I wouldn't think of it.

Odom: You wouldn't think of it? What about other public relations men?

Fowler: I wouldn't work for a company whose product I didn't believe in. I mean I work for this chili company I formed, and sometimes I can't stand the sight of it. But I can't get out of it. But a candidate's philosophies are sometimes publicly not the same as they are personally. We have a...for years we've had a great controversy over liberals and conservatives and reactionaries and moderates, and I was trying to figure out this label after the war. So, I think it's very loosely used and we've got people I know...that most of my friends disagree with me politically altogether. They called themselves liberals, but they're not really. And I always say I'm liberal in the morning and conservative in the evening. But I finally got a definition of the labels. I couldn't figure out. They say that liberals mind other people's business. A conservative minds his own business. (laughter) That's the nearest I could come to definitions back in those days after World War II. Because a lot of people who call themselves conservatives, whole philosophies change so much. This country now back like Norman Thomas says, they're so far ahead of him in socialism. In fact, he was a big enemy of the government now...he is mad at the government because they are taking over his philosophy and gone farther to left with it, as he claims. So, people don't know any more the difference really, in Socialism and Communism and so called Americanism. Big cities like Dallas an arch-conservative city with Republican mayor are now participating in Federal programs a few years ago the people would have had a riot if

they brought them up, you know. And socialism is where the government takes care of everybody.

Odom: So, you think this is generally true with public relations men or firms in politics or is this simply a philosophy of yours as an individual?

Fowler: I think public relations men just take the account. They don't worry about the philosophy; they just do the routine, working the hand outs. But if you try to sell a liberal candidate about like the same way you try to sell a conservative you just have a different approach on the subject matter, kind of like covering a story. You don't know whether you're covering different types. You write what you see. What you think should be written.

Odom: Well, do you have some sort of code of ethics or something of this sort? I mean, or is it handled as a practical matter? I mean, it looks to me like it theoretically it may not be practically impossible...theoretically possible for a man to go to work for a candidate and sabotage his campaign.

Fowler: It sure is, and I think...

Odom: Do you think this happens?

Fowler: I don't think they'd do it on purpose; I think they'd do it accidentally...

Odom: (chuckle) Well...

Fowler: Lack of knowledge of what they should be doing.

Odom: I meant deliberately.

Fowler: A lot of it is you spread as many rumors as you can about the



opposition, and print the things that you don't think you can have your hand called on. And you try to stay above board on those. I always tell the story...it's not true, but I enjoy telling it. On the campaign with Shivers when we'd get in some small town they'd go to bed. My job was to wander down the streets and to act like I was drunk. YOU know, I'd say, "I...I...I'm...Ra...a...alph... Y...Y...Yar...r...borough. I...I...I'm...a...ca...a...nadate..." (laughter)

Odom: It's not true. (chuckle)

Fowler: No...

Odom: Was it true even, as you said in the column that Jimmy Banks wrote, that were you were concerned about Governor Shivers coming in with the sirens blowing...

Fowler: Yes...

Odom: And tying up traffic. But did you actually go around and tell people that it was too bad about...

Fowler: Down there in Fort Worth there was a big crowd that was on the street and I walked up and down saying, "Yarborough sure tears up things, doesn't he?" (chuckle)

Odom: This is actually true?

Fowler: Yes...uh'huh, I did it as a gag. We finally stopped that because the worst thing a man can do running for office is to run people off the streets with a police escort.

Odom: You finally stopped going in with police escorts?

Fowler: Yes, we stopped that. It's nice of them to recognize a man who is Governor is coming in as a candidate. You put on a big show,

but you block traffic. And, as I said, I can see people throwing their poll taxes out their car windows, you know...things like that.

The worst thing about working for a governor in my job--and others have had it since--you have to take all of the night calls that come to the Governor. The mansion refers them to your home. And I did a survey. I lived up on a ranch on a lake then, where I lived for a number of years.

Odom: Is this when you were working for Governor Shivers the second time, there, when you were working as an assistant...executive assistant?

Fowler: Yes, I would get these night calls. And I...I made a survey. After eleven o'clock at night, all the calls were from drunks or nuts. Then somebody calls up demanding this and wanting that. And I say, "I'll make a note of it and take care of it tomorrow." You immediately forget it; nothing ever comes back on it...never hear from them again. So late at night, that's when the drunks and the screwballs start calling. We were up in, I think St. Louis one time in this suite and the phone rang about midnight; he'd been in bed and it woke me up. And some Texas...I take it back. We were in Washington--this call came from St. Louis. Some Texan up there at a convention. He was having a party in his room and he was telling these...they were talking about their governors. And they said they couldn't ever speak to...couldn't reach them, you know. Said, "I can talk to our governor any time I want to.

I'll show you." So he called Austin and found out where we were. he said, "I got up a ten dollar bet that I can talk to our governor." I said, "Just a minute." I came back to the phone in about thirty seconds, said, "Yes, this is Governor Shivers." (laughter) He won his bet. (laughter) And I told the Governor about it the next morning.

Odom: Could you...well, let me ask you this. Now is 1952, I believe, you said you went back to work for Governor Shivers. Is that... did you go back to work for him at the time the campaign was starting?

Fowler: No, it was over then.

Odom: It was over when you went back.

Fowler: Handled all his appointments and traveled with him...toughest job with the governor.

Odom: After the convention...that is after the election.

Fowler: Toughest job with the Governor is handling his appointments. He has so much time, and so many people want to see him.

Odom: Did...did you work at all...I've forgotten now what I...what you were doing. You were out in Midland, I believe you said...

Fowler: Yes...

Odom: ...in the interim there. Did you work at all in the Eisenhower-Stevenson campaign in 1952? Or were you...

Fowler: I was working for Shivers then.

Odom: You were with him then?

Fowler: Yes...

Odom: I thought you said you didn't go back to work for him until after

the '52...

Fowler: I went back in '52.

Odom: After the election or before?

Fowler: No, when he was Governor I wasn't working in the...yes, I did. I was in the later part of the presidential campaign 'cause we had Eisenhower at the Alamo where Shivers introduced him. I remember that. I lost track of a little time there.

Odom: (chuckle) That's what I was...I was getting at was whether you worked...essentially the governor's race was over...the primaries and so on. But in the...were you...you were an Eisenhower supporter then, in the 1952 election?

Fowler: Yes, very much so at that national convention. I couldn't take Stevenson.

Odom: I see. You have been a Democrat...Texas Democrat, though...

Fowler: Except that year.

Odom: Democrats for Eisenhower, according to your...

Fowler: I never voted anything but a Democratic ticket.

Odom: Could you compare Governor Shivers to...some reflections on him. Or compare him to perhaps other politicians you worked for or known, however you want to approach it?

Fowler: Well, he too was an orator sort of like Dies, you know. He could hold an audience very well. At one time he was a liberal, way back there where he grew up. And one time we were driving from Galveston to Port Arthur, his home town, where he talked to a luncheon club. We passed this Texas company refinery. He at one time was assistant time-keeper. He was talking about it. I said,

"Do you know, if you had stayed on that job you might have been time-keeper today instead of having this tough job as governor." But the governor's office is a very difficult, hard job. It's day and night, and new problems every hour come up. I can't understand why anybody would really want to be governor. I was always opposed to any friend of mine (chuckle) being governor because they go through so much torment. And he liked politics and he was smart in handling the legislature. And he had the people who opposed him, and they were good friends except politically. And he always was conservative; he did a lot of things that the liberals would think would be their cause. I mean, a lot of people have the human feelings even though they might call themselves conservatives or anything else. I thought he made a very fine governor as far as somebody I'd like to support.

Odom: What did he privately say about, oh, Judge Yarborough, for example, who ran against him so often as a candidate there in the '50's, and with whom he had lots of public spats? I wondered what...

Fowler: Well, I couldn't say on...I couldn't say in this microphone what he said to me privately. (chuckle) But I remember when they had the run-off in '54, I believe it was, that we had to get ahold of Shivers' supporters in the Bahamas, and the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, and everywhere else to come back and go to work to win this thing. It's the same problem they're having now with the Preston Smith-Don Yarborough race, is getting these people back to vote.

Odom: Gone on vacation or something. Is that it?

Fowler: Well, I knew Ralph Yarborough very well when he was district judge at Austin--entirely different person. One of the finest people I've ever met. A very quiet and a very courteous gentleman and something happened to him somewhere to become irate over things. He's the mildest person I ever knew. District Judge and I was a little surprised at the change he took.

Odom: He still seems like, sometimes on occasion, a very mild person depending on...

Fowler: Boy, he can turn irate.

Odom: He turns and blasts out in the press anyway. I don't know how he privately...

Fowler: Well, we always knew the reason he did come back and run for Governor is he is no doubt owned by the labor unions in Washington. Being on the Labor Committees of Texas there is much more valuable than being governor. And they just won't let him come back. I've been convinced of that a long time that these people that support you, you have to stay with them.

Odom: Do you know, or do you recall any incidents or occasions of Governor Shivers private reactions to these problems with the land commissioner and the land scandals in 19...I guess that was in 1954, wasn't it?

Fowler: I had left him when that big thing broke, in the Giles case but I remember Bascom Giles wanted to be governor very badly. And he told me one day that there's just two things I need--one is either to be governor and have all that power or to have a lot of money. I finally figured he just studied the situation figured he couldn't

be governor so he picked the other route. But he was a man, you couldn't find anything against his record. It was amazing. It shook everybody up very much. As Shivers says, "When something like that happens what can you do?" You know, except just face it, take the consequences of it. And he wanted me to come back with him when he was having his fight with Lyndon Johnson over the convention in the state, you know.

Odom: Yes. That was in '56.

Fowler: '56. But I wouldn't leave the Herald to go back into that fight. Amazingly, I never have understood it, but every time we went to Washington, the man that met us at the airport in a limousine was Lyndon Johnson. We didn't tell anybody we were going but the airline. I guess the airline was tipping him off.

Odom: Somebody had to...

Fowler: But he was the majority leader and he had his chauffeur and his majority leaders' limousine out at the airport and would spend the evening with us. He was there every time. Of course, I've known Lyndon Johnson since before he was in Congress, very well, and I have never gone for him personally because of the way he treated his staff. In fact, I walked out on a press conference in '48 in San Antonio when the phone rang accidentally in the suite. The girl came in to catch it and he turned around and cussed her out for letting it ring, turned around and smiled, and I just got up and walked out. I just don't believe in people doing that.

Odom: I suppose Governor Shivers was always very even-tempered and...

Fowler: Not necessarily. No, oh, no. He could be very firm; he wasn't

mean, but he could be very firm when you didn't do your job like he thought it ought to be done. But he was very generous with his staff, at Christmas time, with presents. We had a staff meeting every day. They don't do that any more with their staffs, you know governors don't. Every morning we had a staff meeting and would go over the program and things like that.

Odom: Was he as good a listener as Mr. Hart says he is?

Fowler: Yes, very much so. And he would insist that you would not agree with him, if you don't agree with him. And you could debate him. You can't do that with many people. I've always said--and I get nowhere with it--every big corporate president or governor should have one man under contract who walks in in the morning every day and says, "Everything you said last night is the most stupid thing I've ever heard." You know, to bring his ego down. To level him off because most people in an office like that either a president of a corporation or of a university even, or governor, the people around try to...always bragging on him or something like that and eventually I think it goes to a head of anybody.

Odom: You do need an ego deflating.

Fowler: Yes, the bad have to be under contract or he would fire him every time he walked in and called him things, you know, disagreed with him and tell him how crazy he was and how stupid that was and what a mistake. I think the scariest incident I've ever had in my life was when the governor took a trip to Chicago. I wasn't with him. And Ben Ramsey being lieutenant governor was out in East Texas in St. Augustine a few days. I got a call from the warden of the



penitentiary who said, "There's a man going to the chair tonight and the Board of Pardons recommended commutation of sentence. And the governor has to, of course, approve it." I called the lieutenant governor in San Augustine. He said, "Well, that's a job for the governor; let him do it." And I finally called Chicago, and I found out that Governor Shivers was coming in that night on a plane. I had these papers from the Board. The warden called me back and said, "This man's going to the chair in a few hours and would like to know whether he's going or not going." I was getting a little bothered, you know. Suppose his plane was late, and I was really upset over it. Finally he got in about 10:45 that night. Met him at the airport and got the papers signed. Went back to the governor's office and called the warden. This execution was to be an hour later. And he said, "Where are you calling from? We have to call you back to verify the call." I gave him the number of the governor's office, and I hung up and got to thinking, "Suppose the switchboard's not open? Suppose the call doesn't come through this particular office?" And I sweated this thing for about thirty minutes. He called back and verified it. And if I'd been thirty minutes later, this guy would have gone to the chair.

Odom: They have no choice on a matter like that, do they?

Fowler: No, and it just shook me up for days. Seeing how close you came to being responsible for somebody going to the electric chair.

Odom: How would you feel if you were the governor and had the...had the choice of one or the other of these things? And, of course, until the...what the...I guess in the Allred administration and the board

of...well, of course, that was Pardons and Paroles then not on...

Fowler: Um'hum. They changed it back there in those days. At one time it was all in the Board of Pardons and Parole's hands, I mean the Governor's hands.

Odom: The Governor's hands, yes.

Fowler: Then later they changed it to where the board could only make recommendations. The governor had to veto or approve.

Odom: That's right.

Fowler: And it's a tremendous responsibility on the governor. But he took it...he took the board's recommendations in almost all cases because they studied it.

Odom: I have a theory that people in executive positions and so on, that the greater their intelligence and self-confidence, the more they will allow staff members and people of this sort to disagree with them and debate with them on matters.

Fowler: He insisted that upon your...if you don't agree with him to tell why and don't just sit there and agree and nod your head. He wanted to know why you disagreed. And if he agreed with you, we'd change the thing. If he didn't, he'd say, "I think you're wrong, but I'm glad to get your ideas."

Odom: And you...you served then during the time you were in the governor's office as essentially his appointments...handling his appointments?

Fowler: And all of his trips. Went with him.

Odom: And went with him on his trips.

Fowler: Yes. But he was a marvel at remembering names of people. I'm very bad at it. You know, I see people I haven't seen...I see an old

Austin friend in a Dallas street, and I don't place him.

Odom: You have to see him in the place you're accustomed to seeing him.

Fowler: Yes, and he was very good at that, and his wife's even better than he was. It was amazing.

Odom: Let's see. You...you handled appointments. What would be a, if there is one, a sort of a typical day when, say, there's no campaign going on or anything in the governor's office for a man in your position?

Fowler: Well, you generally allow from five minutes to fifteen minute appointments, generally. And you've got about half again as many people wanting an appointment as you have room for, you see. And there's a signal system. If somebody just wanted to talk fifteen minutes with him, that'd take care of everything, and they stayed longer, he had a buzzer that he'd tap with his knee to your desk. And you'd come in and stand behind his chair and say, "I'm sorry, we've got another appointment." So they'd leave. And we've had... during the legislative session we gave priority to members of the legislature. And 11:00 every day we had...he came out into the reception room to meet everybody there. If somebody was going to ask him a question like this, they'd come back at 11:00 and they'd get him over in a corner and he'd take care of fifty to a hundred people that way and speak to children and sign proclamations. We'd brief him on who was out there and what they wanted, and so forth. A fellow came up one day, I'll never forget him, that was out of the...then the asylum, wasn't a state hospital and they'd taken all his oil lands away from him according to his story. He wanted

the governor to get it back for him. And I was trying to put him off, trying to send him to another department which handles...We have people that handle...state departments under the governor's jurisdiction. He said, "I guess you think I'm crazy." I said, "Nothing like that." And he said, "I have a certificate here showing I'm not crazy." And he brought this release out from the state hospital signed, "He's now sane." Said, "Do you have one?" (laughter) Well, it shook me up a bit, because I didn't have one.

Odom: How, say, of course you gave...when the legislature was in session, you gave members of the legislature priority. How did you decide on priorities of other people? Do you have some sort of rule of thumb?

Fowler: Rule of thumb...People come a long distance around the state; you try to see what they want to see him about first. And generally it's something that somebody else can handle from the state departments and save all that time and generally they just want to talk and visit. And I learned, I guess it's the reason I don't have ulcers. While standing there listening to people talk about their problems and things I build sailboats mainly--design them, build them, and launch them. Think about something else and answer yes and no. (chuckle) But surprisingly a large number of people just want to come in and visit and I learned something when Eisenhower was down in the Valley at Shivers' farm. He came down to dedicate the Falcon Dam. He was there two days, I think it was '52, and I had an office there at the farm where he was staying. My job was to okay people the secret service let in that we knew, and in the

mornings Eisenhower would get up and come in this big huge living room; we had a kind of a breakfast buffet set up, you know, coffee and stuff. We'd be the only two people up and I'd say, "Good morning, Mr. President," and he'd say, "Good morning." And people would say, "Why didn't you go over and visit and talk with him?" And I said, "Well, here's the President of the United States, got his mind on things like the Korean War and things like that. And if I go over and just chat with him I'll break his line of thinking." I said, "What could I tell him that he doesn't know or can't find out somewhere else? I can't add anything except light conversation and he's a serious man." But after I got to asking people, I said, "Suppose you had an appointment with the President of the United States for fifteen minutes, what would you talk to him about?" And nobody has ever been able to answer that question. Could they tell him something that he can't find some place else, or give him any correct information he doesn't already know? So what could you add to his day's schedule if you had fifteen minutes? And I still can't get anybody to tell me what they would talk to the President of the United States about if they had fifteen minutes in his office. What could you tell him that he doesn't already know, or can't find out from some part of the government?

Odom: You couldn't tell him anything much.

Fowler: What could you add to his day of knowledge?

Odom: I'd like to have him add to mine some. (chuckle)

Fowler: Yes. If they would just talk.

Odom: If they would, of course, I don't suppose they can. He couldn't tell me any more than he could tell the press, I suppose. I suppose you also worked closely with Mr. Hart who...

Fowler: Oh, yes. He was press secretary when I was on that...He's a very sharp...In fact, we were on the newspaper together down there. He was sports editor and I was a sports writer working under him and...

Odom: He went to work for Governor Jester before...Did he have any influence in getting you into this kind of work?

Fowler: I turned Governor Jester down in '48, and he wanted me to come into his office. I stayed on with the news. It was good money, but I wasn't particularly interested. I knew him real well. I covered his campaign, got along fine with him, but I wasn't particularly interested in changing.

Odom: What would be a typical kind of thing or day that you would do for anyone when you're engaged in a campaign? What kind of sort of routine do you follow there?

Fowler: Well, you stay on the...You make the governor go to bed as early as you can so he can rest. And I always notice in campaigns the adrenalin must flow much faster in a candidate than it does in the people who follow him. Instead of exhausted all the time, he is just full of vim and vigor, kind of like Hubert Humphrey, you see...

Odom: You see him bouncing around, don't you?

Fowler: I think it's adrenalin flow. Excitement of being the candidate. You just try to make him go to bed as early as you can and then

you stay on the telephone calling headquarters, calling the next town you're going to and see how everything is laid out, get the next day's program set up, departures and arrivals and what you're going to do, working it out and you find out later when you're in Abilene, you should be in Houston. When you're in Houston, you ought to be in Abilene. You know, you're never in the right place at the right time. You get to a town and these local people have worked out a speech and they come around and say, "We want you to drive to this fellow's house; he can't come to the meeting, and we want you to see him." So you've got to drop everything and rush out to some fellow's house and change it up some, but the main job is to get him in on schedule and out on schedule. And we always worked that very well. We'd go in and say to these local people that we had to leave at a certain time. And the worst thing we had was somebody meet us at the airport and they've got a car there for him and some fellow driving it wants to talk to him. He goes looking back talking to the governor and not watching where he's driving. It scares you to death. So, finally, we started using highway patrol drivers (chuckle) when you've got to go some place to meet him at the airport.

Odom: I see, to take him wherever he wants to go.

Fowler: So if you can't when you're working with...in a campaign... Blakley and I drove over the state. We didn't fly but just a little. So, we had his nephew driving and my strict rule was you don't exceed the speed limits because it would be very bad publicity if they arrested the candidate...driver for a candidate

for speeding. Be quite a story--violating the laws.

Odom: Would you just briefly relate or amplify, if you want to, the example of the Cadillac and the...

Fowler: Chevrolet?

Odom: ...Chevrolet that Banks wrote for the Dallas News.

Fowler: (Chuckle) Well, I always...I initiated these things with Shivers. You go to a reception, and they have cocktails, for example. There's photographers and they want to take pictures of the governor and the people. They line up and he's got a cocktail glass in his hand. Your first job is to get that out of his hand, you know. Because that doesn't look good in a picture and not coming back...

Odom: It's not going to win you any votes, and it could lose you some.

Fowler: Very many, and you don't lose your drink anyway, just hide it until the picture's taken. Many things like that, and not looking too fancy or driving big limousines, but try to stay in something so normal people won't say, "Gosh, what a car," you know, "I wonder if tax payers bought that," you know. Of course, Shivers had no money problems personally.

Odom: No.

Fowler: And none politically either. And luckily the...you know when Coke Stevenson was governor of the state, the state couldn't spend any money. It couldn't build anything. They had a lot of surplus. Luckily Jester moved into the surplus period. And Shivers moved in when money was mainly getting much tighter. He was very much opposed to certain types of taxes like sales



tax, income tax, and...very...would fight them all the time...suggestions of tax programs. Those little things are the things I always thought that mounted up. The little things that are done, not the big things. Just how he treats people, how he meets people, how he talks to them on the telephone, how available he is, how he appears when he is making a speech. You sit in the back of the audience, and you think he's going too long, you do like this. Like they do on TV. [Motions by wiggling a finger]

Odom: I see. So you're sort of a director, you might say...

Fowler: Yes, you take it on that a way.

Odom: ...on the spot type of director.

Fowler: Yes, and you...your job is to...he can't think of everything. He's thinking of what he's going to do. You've got to act sort of like a valet, you know. You've also got to get his clothes pressed if he's in a hotel. When you check in, the first thing you do is get things like that done.

Odom: I see. When you were working with him, and, you say, travelled with him when he went out of town when you were in the governor's office, who else would go along with you?

Fowler: Just the two of us.

Odom: Just the two of you?

Fowler: And he taught this man's Bible class--I think he still teaches it--at the Baptist church, a funeral home there in the assembly room there. What do you call a funeral home? In the Cook Funeral Home there close to the capitol across from the mansion.

Odom: Chapel, I guess it's called.

Fowler: Chapel, yes. And I got to go there some. I'm not a Baptist. I got to go to this class almost every Sunday because we'd leave town after the meeting after the men's Bible class was over. And, you know, we'd come back on Saturday night after a trip, he'd study his lesson for the next day. But each time I'd go, they'd introduce the visitors. And they introduced me each time I'd go. And they'd suggest I join it, and I said, "No." Said, "Why not?" I said, "You'll stop introducing me." (laughter) But we left almost every Sunday on a trip some place.

Odom: Do you get to know a man like that very intimately travelling with him that way? Or does he pretty well keep quiet or busy thinking about something? You don't engage in a great deal of small talk.

Fowler: Well, I, of course, gaged a lot with him, needled him a lot. I... he could take a lot of needling. I needled him all the time about things, but sometimes he'd doze on the plane, napping, and read. But you don't usually bother him just to carry on a conversation. You study the fellow, not studiously, but you study him because...

Odom: You learn to react.

Fowler: You learn to react and see what his needs might be. You try to stay in advance of his thoughts of what he might need to do.

Fowler: But you told him what to do when he hits this town. It's all laid out there in the paper. You can debate with him about it. I made mistakes, of course, a lot of times, and...We were in the Adolphus after the Rice-Alabama Cotton Bowl game and...in this Presidential Suite. I left the hall door open and had the TV on the Rose Bowl game. He's back in the bedroom calling home or something, and Joe

Kilgore, later in Congress--he was a conservative leader then--was with us, just the three of us. And H. L. Hunt, whom I knew, but didn't know me, came down the hall. He had a room down there. I invited him in. He thought I was some oil man or something, but he sat down and started to peering intently at this TV set watching the Rose Bowl game. And just to make conversation, I said, "Mr. Hunt, which team do you like?" And he said, "I think I like Michigan State." I said, "Well, to make it interesting, I'll bet you a quarter." He didn't say anything. I knew I'd pulled a faux pas. And directly he started rubbing his head, you know..."Professional gambling..." you know, going on like this and making these awful faces and studying this thing and said, "I don't think I'll bet you...just give my moral support." (chuckle) So Kilgore walks through about that time and I went on over there. And I said, "Joe, kind of spread it around I made the world's richest man back down on a bet." And he said, "You stupid idiot. He thought you meant a quarter of a million." (laughter) He said I turned white as a sheet. (laughter)

Odom: He didn't really, though, did he?

Fowler: I don't know.

Odom: He didn't know who you were.

Fowler: No, he didn't know who I was, but, boy, I almost fainted. (laughter)  
That ought to be a lesson about betting people.

Odom: You better say strictly what you mean. (laughter)

Fowler: Oh, my gosh. If you don't enjoy things, you're in a heck of a shape, you know.

I even enjoyed the wars, because I found that a sense of humor among the boys fighting is a saving grace of them. You know, when you've got some old...you've got this combat fatigue coming up and tenseness and all that some guy anywhere cracks a pun, a joke, and everybody laughs. It's the best psychiatric treatment you can have.

Odom: I've found that a sense of humor is the best thing you have, no matter what you're doing. And teachers especially, I think.

(chuckle) Let me move on here for a bit and ask you when you first became acquainted with Senator Blakley and how you came to get tied up with him and go to work with him.

Fowler: Well, he used to drop in when Shivers and I'd be in Dallas, you know. And he's a very proper type man. We got to know each other pretty well. And I worked in his campaign in, I believe it was '58. And then I went back to help the DPS reorganize. And I was in Dallas and dropped in on him one day, and he said he's trying to find an administrative assistant to replace a fellow. He asked if I knew anybody, and I recommended people like Weldon Hart and others. He said, "What's the matter with you taking it?" It was about four times what I was making, so I took it. And my job with him was the softest I guess I ever had. He's a very wonderful, polite man, you know. He's very...the last of the gracious type gentleman, you know, the old school. And he was an amazing fellow having come up in utter poverty in Oklahoma. He was a self-made man. I think he went up through about the eighth grade. He decided he wanted to be a lawyer, so he studied law and became a

lawyer. I take it back. He wanted to be a CPA. Studied accounting. And an accountant then would get twenty-five dollars an eight-hour trick. He would work two a day.

Odom: Two eight-hour days.

Fowler: Yes. He worked like everything. He'd invest his money in raw land...undeveloped land. Thought that was the best investment. Then he became an accountant for Braniff. Then he decided he wanted to be a lawyer so he studied law and became a lawyer, too. That's where he got involved as the chief stock holder in Braniff, formed the Braniff-Blakley Foundation. But he gave money by the millions to colleges, set up that legal foundation at SMU, and built this big building out at Abilene Christian College. But he'd never let any publicity get out on it. It had to be a secret gift. He wanted no credit. An amazing man in that respect, but he was very firm in his belief in the constitution...in constitutional government. And we traveled and campaigned talking to groups and asking questions, and he would give answers he thought were truthful, and the way he believed. They might be bad political answers--he didn't care. He was one of those forthright men, and a great collector of art.

Odom: I suppose a candidate like that though poses some problems for someone in your profession here, as a public relations man or campaign advisor, and so on. Doesn't it or not?

Fowler: Very many because he...oh, he's easy to handle, so to speak.

Odom: Yes, I didn't mean in that respect.

Fowler: He went to bed real early and got up awfully early and drove a lot,

but he stuck to...he didn't change his style of speaking or anything else the whole campaign. He didn't blast the opposition.

He just...he believed that way. But he was a very rare individual.

Odom: Would he give you any trouble on doing the little things that, you know, you talked about here that you should do...?

Fowler: Not in the least, and we had to go to the round-up every spring on his ranch--he had a huge ranch west of San Angelo. And although I was raised on a ranch, I hate round-ups. This was actually a chuck wagon round-up. You stay up there two or three weeks eating on the chuck wagon and herding cattle and stuff like that, it almost drove me out of my mind. (chuckle) But he loved that, more than anything else. He was a very rare man, and he stayed the same weight all his life...looked after himself...very wonderful wife. He treated her with the respect that an average man would treat the Queen of England, you know, all the time. He was just sort of a gracious individual. And I was laughing the other day. He was the one that sponsored Ramsey Clark for the appointment to the attorney general's office, in charge of the land division.

Odom: He had something to do with his appointment, then?

Fowler: Yes. I don't imagine he'd agree with Ramsey now about the rioting and stuff like that.

Odom: Did you get to know Mr. Blakley very intimately?

Fowler: Very much so, I think. I've seen him a number of times since. He had a good sense of humor, too. He was part Indian. He was very much down to earth. Although he has that magnificent Exchange Park set up out there, he lives a very simple life; he didn't go

to parties but very seldom...One time this painter in Dallas that does pictures for you for two or three thousand dollars and turns out two or three a day, you know, talking about it. They had a luncheon at SMU one time, unveiled his portrait, and he got infuriated. He didn't want his portrait...you know, he didn't want that kind of recognition for what he'd done. He's one of the few people I've known in my life that did things and wanted no recognition whatever.

Odom: ...No recognition for it...He doesn't sound like the usual self-made man, does he?

Fowler: No, he doesn't. The most truly self-made man I've ever known. Because he could have gone any direction. When he came out of Oklahoma he decided he wanted to be a CPA, and he studied on his own and did that.

Odom: Sounds like he's not as driving and as aggressive, usually, as self-made...successful self-made men of that sort.

Fowler: I think he wanted to be in the Senate merely because he was so concerned about the constitutional government and the old school. And he made quite a few talks.

Odom: Were you...let's see. He was appointed by Governor Shivers originally.

Fowler: Yes...

Odom: ...At the time of Price Daniel's resignation.

Fowler: And I was his...and I was his press man in Washington.

Odom: You were...you were his press man in Washington. I intended to go back and ask you about your duties with him when you were in Wash-

ington. What...what does a press man for a United States Senator do anyway? (chuckle)

Fowler: Mainly you try to keep the press out, (laughter) but things like stuff interesting to your state or district, you try to get releases out to the press first and some of the departments that you are doing something down in Texas. You let it get out immediately. And keep him posted on what you pick up around the Senate from other people. What's coming up, what's going on, and sometimes what the thinking is about things.

Odom: What...what kind of staff or how big a staff does the average Senator have?

Fowler: Then he had about twenty-five. I imagine it's about doubled or more than that now.

Odom: You think that most of them have...(chuckle)

Fowler: Oh, yes. Fifty to a hundred easily.

Odom: Well, you'd have a press aid; you'd have a...

Fowler: A couple now.

Odom: A couple or three.

Fowler: Yes.

Odom: Appointments...what? One made appointments or...

Fowler: They've got a staff back in their home district, too, you know. We didn't have that then. In fact, Congressman Pickle of Austin has a staff of two people back in Austin...big staff in Washington. Yarborough has a big staff back there, and Tower has one...four or five people.

Odom: Have you been associated with any...many political campaigns in



any close way since the one with Mr...Senator Blakley? Did you... you did work for him you said in 1960 in the campaign?

Fowler: Yes. I left him in '61. I came back to Dallas and I stayed with him another year. I went to the University of Dallas for about a year before I went to the Dallas News again.

Odom: You did? What were you doing there? Studying...

Fowler: Yeah.

Odom: ...Studying public relations?

Fowler: No, I was doing PR.

Odom: Oh, doing PR.

Fowler: I was...they wanted a Protestant, (chuckle) and we had a lot of fun.

Odom: You worked for Dr. Morris, then...

Fowler: I worked mainly under Bishop Dunne. I said, "Why don't you get a Catholic out here?" The Catholic is always having to bow and bend his knees, and you can't...you know. But a Protestant doesn't pay any attention to kissing the rings (laughter) or things like this. So they had this big Catholic Congress while I was there and I handled that and had a lot of fun...great people. I always loved to go to the faculty meetings 'cause they had a bar set up. (laughter) Very few colleges have that.

Odom: (laughter) Yes, especially none of them in the state...(laughter) universities on state property.

Fowler: (laughter)...No...Well, all of my time I've been trying to figure out things that need to be done. I...after this TWU dorm fire I went to the State Coordinating Board and talked to the boss there about whether the colleges in Texas--state colleges--have any fire

drills or rules laid down for reporting fires. He said, "We have nothing to do with that. That's entirely up to the college board." I said, "It looks like somebody'd have a campaign of some sort... you know, what to do in the event of a fire or an emergency...to call the fire department instead of calling the campus police."

(chuckle) That's the reason I call Bill Rives "Little Arson Annie."

(laughter) But things like that...I'm very much concerned about safety--always have been--with people, particularly traffic, when I was working in that field, and the crime rate. And I organized a crime-stop program...the Chamber of Commerce in Austin several years ago, but I couldn't get the business people interested enough in it. I just pulled out of it.

Odom: I guess you...you knew Governor Allred...

Fowler: I was assigned to him...I was assigned to him as a highway patrolman.

Odom: Oh, you actually accompanied him?

Fowler: Well, David was a little baby, later, and the other boy I carried in my arms. And Ed Clark was his secretary. On picnics...I got a picture I found the other day. It was taken about the last year Allred was in office. We had a picnic out on the creek...his office staff. I played an accordion then. And I was blowing...playing the accordion...Mrs. Allred was playing the keys, and I was pumping it.

Odom: And you were pumping it. (laughter)

Fowler: (laughter) Took a good picture. She was a great lady.

Fowler: I see David frequently. He is, of course, working in Dolph Bris-

coe's campaign.

Odom: What...do you think that your work there, perhaps, started your interest in this kind of work in future years, working for the highway patrol and assigned to Governor Allred, or not? Do you think you would have drifted into this type of...off and on...this type of thing?

Fowler: No, my whole heart was set on newspapering. But newspapers then paid five and six dollars a week for a twelve-hour day, seven days a week...if you could get a job. So I took this job because it was offered to me, and it paid a hundred and twenty-five and expenses...

Odom: Really? That's pretty...

Fowler: You got to ride a motorcycle and a hundred twenty-five a month... was a lot of money. And you traveled all over the state, and you didn't have too much trouble. I always tell the story that...chasing a truck in the Valley one day for speeding. This driver finally pulled over and a big, burly truck driver piled out and said, "If you give me a ticket, I'm going to beat you into this pavement." I said, "You're not going to beat anybody." He said, "Why ain't I?" I said, "'Cause I'm not going to give you a ticket." (laughter) I always said that was my philosophy. (chuckle)

Odom: What...what was your impression of Governor Allred?

Fowler: I liked him very much. He wasn't as light and humorous as most... a very serious minded young fellow. He was very determined in what he believed in, and quite polite...and a vigorous prosecutor. And he particularly bit a high prosecuting against gambling. One of my jobs one time in the highway patrol was at Christmas time,

the other officers and I...they rented evening clothes for us and drove us to places like this big gambling den south of Houston. At Christmas time it was a great big club and it was loaded down with students home for vacation...college holidays, and other people. And dance music, and...and a big gambling dive in the back, I think. Our job was to go in and gamble and come back out and sit down like we were one of the party. If we didn't come out at eleven o'clock, the rangers came in and raided the gambling joint.

Odom: If you didn't come out?

Fowler: Yes.

Odom: ...At eleven...

Fowler: But if we were still in there, they came in and raided it. We raided several places.

Odom: Well, what happened when you came out? After you came out did they...?

Fowler: There was no gambling, see...there's no gambling. If there was no gambling, we came out.

Odom: Oh, I see.

Fowler: If they were gambling, we stayed in and joined the party 'til they came in and raided it. And I didn't know anything about gambling, and still don't. And this fellow was dealing the cards so fast it looked like...two four's looked like an eight to me. (laughter) But I turned in an expense account on this thing for forty dollars. I'd lost it gambling in this job. And the State Comptroller wouldn't pay it; it was too much money to...out of the Governor's enforcement fund...it was too much money to be spending in one night.

Had to go to the Attorney General the next day and get a mandamus from the Supreme Court. There's a story printed about it. I have a copy of it now, about the legal effort I had to go through to get this forty dollars back that I'd spent on expense account. But Allred was a very...I don't know, he was really going after the gamblers.

Odom: Do you have any other interest stories about your work as an undercover detective back in...in the '30's with the Austin Police Force or Highway Patrol?

Fowler: Oh, we had a fake kidnapping on the University campus one time. There was a boy who was kind of a radical leader there. They faked a kidnapping, and Shivers then was president of the student council. I think he was mixed up in it a little bit. There was a big political fight on the campus among the students, and we knew it wasn't a kidnapping, but we weren't taking any chances. And I was assigned to this case about two weeks, and this boy was hidden out. And finally I found out what had happened, and one of the law students was mixed up in the handling of the kidnapping. And I found about it. And Sunday morning I found him with a banquet, caught him in a banquet. I said, "This boy's not back here tonight at midnight, this case is going to the grand jury in the morning." And that night he called from a tavern down on Low Avenue, and I brought him in. And he signed his own statement about fifteen pages. But the police wanted to drop it, and some of us decided that it'd be a good idea but suppose something should happen to him, then you'd be held responsible for not working on

it. But one of the jobs was going down the part of town where the girls walk the streets. Is it all right to put this on the tape?

Odom: Yes. It's all right.

Fowler: And they'd approach me, ask for a match or something. And I'd say, "Well, I've got a car over here." And I'd take them over in this filling station, for example. It was all dark. Open the front door and put them in. And there's a detective sitting under the wheel. We picked them up that way. The next day they left town. During the depression days, the job then was to move transients on through...criminals...get them out of town. But it was very interesting work. That's when I got to know Frank Homer real well.

Odom: He was a very famous Texas Ranger. I was going to ask you a while ago...I really intended to when you...after you got through just briefly outlining your career. Who've been some of the most... been the most...who has been the most important person in your background in shaping your philosophy and your approach to life and so on, would you say? Could you point to any particular individuals going clear on back?

Fowler: That's a very difficult thing. Some of them have tried to shape it and failed...I'm rather a non-conformist and shape myself according to a particular pattern...going down a certain trail. I believe in doing things that are interesting. And I don't believe in crime; I don't believe in things like that. But I believe in enjoying life, and if you see somebody that really

needs some help that you can help, that wants to be helped, I believe in helping them. I don't believe in helping people who act like they want help and what they want is...is not guidance, but they want to, say, take money and run with it.

Odom: Want you to do it for them rather than helping them.

Fowler: Yes. Like this last Easter there was a Negro been to Viet Nam twice and was working for Republicans, mingling among that group, and he had adopted a Negro family and was doing that kind of work...using his own money. And I never met him yet, but Dave Vessels that works for him now, retired from the Game Department, was our Air Force PIO in Italy during the war, ran the press camps, told me he's trying...this woman couldn't work; she was in a car wreck; her husband had abandoned the family; she was starving. So I gave him money to give him to take to her. So you feel good about that sort of thing. I've helped some people individually and...but I think most people are pretty much like that. We don't practice it enough but you see the effect of what you're doing, or either somebody tells you the effect of it. And I object to big organizations that take this money and use it for administrative costs--most of it goes to that...your big campaigns, of course, give some money to charity. But I believe in seeing the effect of what you do. Just like the...I was reading the Dallas News this morning about Resurrection City. They're actually out there trying to get volunteers to help clean up the trash and got two dozen. They found all these beer and whiskey bottles there which are against the rules...on

government property. And everybody's up there spending this money for things like that. But I don't...I don't sympathize with things like that. I don't sympathize with a fellow hanging around taverns that's always talking about being broke. And I've known these people all my life that...that...we used to have them in Austin, and have big cars. Drive from one church to another picking up gifts and things like that--professional people like that. But I don't know who shaped my philosophy. I guess the old Chief of Police at Austin did more than anything. He had a...greatest philosopher I've ever known--Chief Thorpe. He's still living...retired now. But he led a very...he was a very fair main to everybody. And somebody came in to accuse a policeman of something, he had them sit down...very polite. And he brought the policeman in, said, "Now you tell him to his face what he did." That cools them off very quickly...stick to the facts. He is a very fine man and...very uneducated. He had a great philosophy about things. He could remember things that happened in great, great detail...happened years and years ago. And he was a...I think he was a great law enforcement officer.

Odom: You were giving us...giving me your...us...your definition, while ago, of a liberal and conservative and a reactionary. Which one do you think you are?

Fowler: As I said, I feel liberal in the morning, and conservative in the afternoon, but I have never known...I guess I've voted with the conservatives most times. But I don't think anybody can really... political liberalism is different from personal liberalism, same



as the other. And I guess...I have a sister that graduated from this college in 1913. Taught me in high school. Probably shaped my life. She's still living; my parents are dead. But she did a lot to shape me. Was a very stern, strict. That old school of teachers...taught all her life, retired years ago. But we used to live at a place called Pilot Point out here.

Odom: Oh, you used to live at Pilot Point?

Fowler: As a child.

Odom: I didn't know that you ever lived...

Fowler: My father taught school up here, and she went to school up here. And...

Odom: Where did your father teach up here?

Fowler: Some high school here or elementary school, I think.

Odom: In Denton?

Fowler: He rode a train back and forth. Oh, I remember about that place. I had a dog named You Know. People'd say, "What's your dog's name?" I'd say, "You Know." (laughter)

Politicians to me are an entirely different type of people than anybody else. They live a different life, and they think differently. You know, they...politics is so different from business.

Odom: What...in what ways, I mean, you know can you see the difference?

Fowler: Their personalities are different. The...many of them say things they don't mean with a feeling they don't feel. A lot of them operate kind of like con-men or super salesmen. But it's a routine they have of being, you know, happy, gracious, and "We've

got these problems, and we're going to solve them," and everything, but they spend someone else's money, you know. And that's a lot easier to do than spend your own. I think he tries very hard to act in accord with the thinking of the constituency he can see that the majority he represents. And he has lots of advice from groups of individuals in this district about what to do. He tries to follow it pretty much. And I know very few have gone against the majority in their thinking, I'm sure. And he tries to vote in a way that might please the majority whether he believes it or not. And...

Odom: What about the individual, though, in the organizations...or representatives of the organizations? Don't these sometimes perhaps have an inordinate amount of effect on...is this...

Fowler: Very much and amazingly they...sometimes are worse when the politician's demanding things that are not right to have. You know what I mean? Things of personal benefit. A great many of these people that pose themselves as civic leaders and things like that have many selfish interests that create problems for the man they're trying to work on, and he has a difficult time talking them out of something they're trying to do. But so many business people try to act like politicians in a way with someone else's money. They're...A business man, I think, that's mixed up...shouldn't be mixed up with politics at all. He has to have two separate lines of thinking: one to run his business, and one to deal in politics. I do think they have too many lawyers in public office, in the legislature especially. It's very difficult to get a bill passed

down there that affects law practice. Very difficult to get an anti-crime bill passed because there're so many defense lawyers in the legislature. Lawyers have time. They don't lose any money by being in office because their office can take care of it. They can still have clients.

Odom: I guess you've been an observer of the state legislature and of the governor's office, too, for quite a long time now. I guess since the early '30's anyway, off and on.

Fowler: Since...since 1941.

Odom: Would you give us your impressions, if you could, about how it's changed in the last twenty-five years or so?

Fowler: It has changed a lot. Well, one time we had what you...a great many people would call statesmen, maybe, that believed in our system of saving money and saving taxes...stuff like that. The state didn't owe anybody except an opportunity. But now it's changed a lot. I always said--and I got nowhere with it (I made a lot of talks on this)--that it doesn't make any difference who the governor is or the president is if you have a strong Congress and a strong legislature. If we picked legislators with great care to represent us in our home town or home district, the governor has no power; he just has prestige. And I always said that...told a group in Greenville if you pick out a man you admire most and just, say, whether he's in business or profession, and demand that he run for the legislature. He will say, "I can't because of my business." "We'll look after your business and you go down there and be our representative." You wouldn't

have to write him a letter on anything; he'd vote just like you'd want him to be, and you'd look after his business. But if you'd go out and pick out your strongest local man--I believe this very sincerely--and run him for Congress or the legislature, if the president came down with some wild plans or the governor did you wouldn't have to worry about it, 'cause they don't have that much power. The governor has no power hardly at all, just prestige. This legislature could've voted him down on anything he proposed if it wasn't good for...then if you pick you best people. But we don't do that. We let anybody run for the legislature...pay no attention to them we try to get a strong governor. Well, you don't always get that--enough prestige to control things. And we don't pay enough attention. We go down and vote; we don't ever know the people we're voting for or against.

Odom: How is the quality of the legislators changed over the past twenty-five years?

Fowler: I think it's gone down a lot.

Odom: You think it's gone down a lot in the sense that...

Fowler: Very much in the sense of responsibility...Now the whole theory is "What can I do for the state?" It's "What can I get for the district?"

Odom: In other words, you think the philosophy or the reason for wanting to serve in the legislature has...has changed, in other words.

Fowler: Very much so and every legislator does real well in his business or profession. And the lobbyists have a tremendous amount of effect--the professional lobbyists.

Odom: Do you think that they are stronger and more effective today than...?

Fowler: Well, I think more bills are passed in hotel rooms at night. More members...I've known that. When I was covering the Senate, for example, the members come up at midnight down at the hotel, and the next day the whole program changes 'cause the lobbies have a way of approaching these people they support. The lobbies spend worlds of money helping local members be elected or re-elected. Running for Speaker of the House, for example, is almost a bigger campaign financially than running for governor. They have to look after that. And we don't...we don't take enough interest in the type of person we want to represent us on every feature of legislation. We just pick somebody available; we don't pick anybody that's not available and is desirable.

Odom: This...do you think that the shift that has certainly occurred in the population and with the redistricting that's taken place, the shift from a rural to an urban state as we have really done in the past twenty-five years? Do you think it has any bearing on what you're talking about?

Fowler: Very much so because in the rural areas and the smaller communities people know one another and the word gets around. And in an urban area, we depend on the newspapers, radio, and TV to give us what we call facts. I don't think they always bring them out very clearly. They play along as a...as...I don't know. It's a kind of a way of life.

Odom: You're condemning your profession?

- Fowler: Yes. In that field I condemn it because they don't go out and dig up...they just take handouts, you know. We're famous for handouts from the president. And we always favor them.
- Odom: Do you think there ought to be more journalism, say, that like... like the Texas Observer practices here?
- Fowler: Well, they don't...they practice the other way, too; they just go along with their type of people--they don't...
- Odom: Yes, I'm sure...yes, I know...
- Fowler: They've got the facts and they let the people know.
- Odom: At least they go out though, and...and attempt to do that rather than take handouts primarily.
- Fowler: They take handouts.
- Odom: Well, yes...I suppose so.
- Fowler: I mean a conservative can't get a fair break in the Observer. I do believe in news coverage and real objectivity. I've spent... I've traveled ten days with Don Yarborough when he ran against Connally. And I've never had a complaint. I've traveled with Ralph Yarborough as a newspaper man. But I believe in letting the candidate speak his thoughts and you print them. You don't go out and use your own opinion as the story. But these communities amaze me in the...especially in the urban areas. So many voters don't know the fellow except by his name. They've seen him on TV and they liked the way he did his hair. You know, they don't dig into these things. It's very important.
- Odom: Do you think that perhaps what's implied and what you're saying here is the change in the type of campaigning, to some extent, is

at fault?

Fowler: Television now. People don't read the stories in the papers, except professionals, you know, or...You take a rural area; they get one paper--the weekly. They read it from cover to cover. If you live in Dallas...I'll tell you, I take nine papers a day; I read them pretty thoroughly myself, 'cause I have to with my newsletter. But I find almost identical coverage in all of the papers. So if you read one, except for a couple of exceptions, you've read all of them. I fuss at newspapers about this.

Odom: Tell us about your newsletter that you've got going.

Fowler: Well, I'll give you a couple of them here. I take a slam once a week on the state capitol, what the capitol columnists say.

Odom: Do you have many subscribers to this?

Fowler: Yes. I charge an exorbitant fee they say, and I try to keep out those...

Odom: Fifty dollars yearly?

Fowler: I point out that if they bought these papers every week, it would cost them twice this. They'd have to clip...read them thoroughly. Columnist excerpts and any rumors I pick up around the capitol, and things that are coming up...have a lot of fun with it. It gives you something to do. You can get your thoughts on paper, too.

Odom: I don't believe...I don't recall...think you ever answered my question. Maybe we got on something else there a while ago. Say you haven't worked closely in politics, though, with politicians since you left Senator Blakley in...

Fowler: Only covering campaign...traveling with him.

Odom: Yes, I understand that. Who would you say...would you care to comment...who would you say is the most impressive individual, from the standpoint of all the things that you admire about a man, among the politicians you've known or come to know fairly well?

Fowler: Well, I think Shivers...Shivers would be the one that I thought had more knowledge and more firmness and knew what he...didn't get panicky on things--he'd been in politics so long. And he knew all the people; knew the answers pretty well, and he had a sort of a route he was following and he stayed pretty close to it. And he was pretty open minded with his supporters and the legislature especially. I remember somebody came to him one time talking about running for a state office and he said, "What do you think of it, Governor?" He said, "I think everybody should run for office once--a state-wide office--one time at least." (chuckle) And somebody else said, "Will you support me in my race?" And he said, "I'd like to, but I can't get you but two votes." He said, "I can get votes for myself." And I think that's the thing we face today. We think when Connally endorses somebody or Lyndon endorses somebody, that means election. But people, I don't think, go that way. They might vote for Connally, but they wouldn't go out and say, "Connally told me..." you know, "to vote for this man." And Shivers impressed me with that because he said, "I can't swing votes your way. I could try, but I can't do it."

Odom: Yes. The race which Eugene Locke made--the outcome of his race



for governor sort of indicates what you're talking ab ut.

Fowler: Very much. And I was talking about it the other day. You have a lame-duck Johnson and a lame-duck Connally; you get two lame ducks pushing a turkey, it's all fouled up. (laughter)

Odom: Before I forget to do it--I'm afraid I will--I've been thinking about asking you to do this for some time now--so in case I might forget to do it before we quit here. I wonder...you've been around quite a long time, especially in state politics and around state politicians, and newspaper men and so on, I just wonder would you be willing to mention a few people that you think we might ought to try to interview in our Oral History Project. We're interested in interviewing not just people at the top, but at various levels. Not only interested in the governor's office, the legislature, in administrative boards, and newspaper men, and all these kinds of people. And I wouldn't...if you wouldn't want me to, wouldn't say anything about your mentioning them...I would if you...

[Material omitted here in which Mr. Fowler suggested some people we might interview.]

Fowler: I went down in the '48 general elections to do a story for the Dallas News on the election in Duvall, Jim Wells vote. And I stayed in Alice. I was kind of...he'd [George Parr] thrown a comparable reporter out of the county the day before. I was a little hesitant about who to approach. I finally found out that they had a Republican county chairman there. Duvall County, a Chevrolet dealer. I looked him up, and it was the day before the election.

All the literature's still on his desk. We had a nice chat. And I said, "You know, I'd like to meet this fellow Parr, but he threw a reporter out of the county yesterday." He said, "I can set that up easy; we're business partners." He took me over to his office across from the court house and introduced me. And we had a lively time for about an hour, and I enjoyed it very much. I came out. There was a big fat deputy sheriff leaning against the wall in a chair. I found they'd been stationed there in case there was some trouble. The next day he took me to all the polling places to watch how they vote.

Odom: He did? What'd you think of Mr. Parr?

Fowler: Well, he's a...he explained to me that he liked politics...always liked it like he liked football. He'd go to two games on Saturday. He'd fly to one at Rice in the afternoon and Dallas for the night game, something like that. And I asked him why he fell out with Coke Stevenson. He used to support him, you know. He said, "My friends over in Webb County over here wanted me to help them get a district attorney appointed. And I told them I would help them with my friend, Stevenson. And he wouldn't go along. And I lost face with my friends. That's what brought it on." So if Stevenson had appointed a district attorney at Laredo, he might be president today. You can't tell. (chuckle) But he...there was a game between them, he said. And we watched the voting and these deputies and others would meet these voters in their cars and stand there talking before they went inside. It looked like any other polling place except you couldn't go inside so I don't

know what went on inside when they counted the ballots. They would give the Republicans a certain number of ballots to make it look all right. And when I found out his business partner was Republican chairman and hadn't done anything to campaign, so he had it well sewed up. He told me very frankly, and I believed it, that politics to him was a game, a sport.

Odom: What else did you do in that 1948 race?

Fowler: Well, I traveled with the candidates and...

Odom: You traveled with the candidates, you say?

Fowler: Yes, traveled with them. I was assigned to the Austin Bureau of the News then, and when Lyndon announced, he had a little press party out at this swimming pool of the apartment he lived in near Austin. He gave us a copy of his speech and announcement. We were all sitting on the grass, and he's sitting on a low lawn chair. I was sitting pretty close to him on the grass and was asking questions. And he's talking about how important military strength was, and I said, "Well, if it's so important why don't they pay a soldier enough to stay in that would compete with what he might make outside?" He leaned over and started shaking his finger and lecturing me about patriotic service, stuff like that. The next day he went to Mayo's with his kidney stones. When he got out of the hospital, he jumped all over me. He said, "You're responsible for that." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I leaned over. I felt that pain hitting my back." (laughter) So he blamed me for his first kidney stone.

Odom: He was kidding, I suppose, wasn't he?

Fowler: No, he swears up and down that's what he did. When that pain hit him, when he leaned over in that chair to lecture me about this patriotic service and stuff.

Odom: Really? Did you cover the court's...any of the court fight after the election?

Fowler: No, I wasn't on that. I was sent to Duvall to dig up the dirt on that end of it.

Odom: From that end of it.

Fowler: Box 13 and stuff.

Odom: Did you really get anything of consequence? You couldn't find out anything, could you?

Fowler: No. In fact, I wrote a story that caused Lyndon to stop me on the street one day and congratulate me. It was very objective, and I wasn't trying to guess at things. I was trying to go by what I saw. And, of course, they had a big barbecue on the court house square after the election was over. See, all the voters came in to be fed, and I picked a Mexican up, a hitchhiker there, just to see what he'd tell me. "Do you know George Parr?" He said, "Si." He said, "My papa, when he need job, he give him job. When he get sick, he get him doctor. He die, he bury him." So that's the kind of following he had. And he...

Odom: A loyal following.

Fowler: When he'd do things like that, you can't lose them. But I see trends now very much of...you know, we've been having so much like the riots, things like that. We've been hearing from the loudmouths, pretty much--professionals on TV and all that stuff.

And I think that now you see a trend among people who've been keeping quiet to move in and stop some of this silly stuff that's going on. I think that's the reason the politicians are concerned now about crime being the number one problem. They're talking about it, but I doubt seriously if they do anything really good about it. It's hard to get the legislature to...I had a bill I had drawn up by a Senator and his law partner several years ago, and I'm going to get it introduced this session for sure, I think.

Odom: Drawn up by who?

Fowler: A state Senator and his law partner. Where the...and all the judges I've talked to say it's constitutional that a criminal has to apprise his victim of his rights before he attacks. Gives the victim the same rights as the criminal has, and sets a separate penalty.

Odom: For that...

Fowler: And the penalty for not notifying his victim of his intended attack is...is bigger than the penalty for the crime he's about to commit. And they can't...and I want to get before a committee in the legislature to see who would vote against the bill that gives the victim the same rights as criminals been given by the courts.

Odom: Do you think that...do you think it's...you have gotten the opinion that it's constitutional?

Fowler: Well, this lawyer, Senator Herring that's been in the legislature, he drew it up with his law partner. And I showed it to a federal judge and a district judge and they didn't see anything wrong with it. Said, "How can the Supreme Court knock out a bill that gives

the victim the same rights as a criminal has?" We have to apprise a criminal of his rights before we can file and the victim gets no notification at all of what's about to happen to him. And it would be funny to see a member of the legislature stand up and vote against this. (laughter)

Odom: That's an unusual...

Fowler: (chuckle) It is unusual but...I mailed out about a thousand copies. I've had many letters from people. And it's hard to get the legislators interested in something as outlandish as that.

Odom: I've about exhausted the questions and the ideas that I had to ask you about ahead of time. I wondered if you had any...anything else you wanted to particularly add. We've been searching your mind here, that might be of historical interest or ought to be maintained?

Fowler: No...The things that used to be looked upon with great dignity by people in observance are rapidly disappearing, you know. It used to be when a governor issued a proclamation, that was a big event. But now, it's almost a daily occurrence, you know. And the things like that that people look down upon--people in office pretty much now. They take a personal attitude toward them. And I fail to see that. I think you should take an official attitude to the job you're doing. Just like a person, because they disagree with you. Most of my very close friends disagree with me wholeheartedly about politics; but we get along fine on other subjects--like fishing and boating, things like that. But I don't know. The people themselves have lost so much interest, and people have told me,

"Why worry about who's Governor of Texas; it's going to be run by Washington anyway." You can't argue with that too much. And...I like politicians personally. Never had a fuss with any of them about anything, because they're nice people if you can get away from their politics.