**George Tames**
**Washington Photographer for the *New York Times***

**Interview #3:**
**The View from the Press Gallery**
**Tuesday, March 8, 1988**

**TAMES:** We were talking about reminiscences of Southwest Washington, and my family life --why Sam Lyons became like a son to my mother. He's not that much older than me. He's about three years older than I am. He was a heavy drinker, and Mom used to be very upset about that, and try to break him of the habit. But he and my father got along great, because my father used to make booze in the kitchen, Mastika they call it Greek, by cooking it on the stove. He and Sam would have a drink after he'd just finished making the stuff, when it was just about an hour old, and used to smooth it off with a little licorice.

When Sam went into the military he went out to Texas for tank training. It was dusty, and he wrote back that he sure could have a drink, but there was absolutely no way to get any booze. So my mother and I conjured up an idea. It was Easter time, and the Greeks make this special bread for Easter, in which they shape it into a cross, and there are eggs in the four corners and one in the center. This symbolizes the Easter resurrection. She made an extra big one, and I hollowed it out. In those days there were no plastic bottles, so we had to use regular glass bottles. I put two pints--or half pints, I don't know which now--in the bread, and stuff it, and put it in a box and marked it: Easter bread, eggs, be careful, stamped all over it, and sent it to him in Texas.

Well, it almost got there intact. In spite of all the cautions on it, apparently the bottles broke there in the camp. They got to the camp okay, but apparently they broke in the camp, and the stuff just permeated this bread. Sam very gingerly picked out the broken glass and then cut up the sopped up bread into small squares, just like they serve at a Greek Orthodox service. At the end of the liturgy, if you're not prepared to take communion, then you just simply receive a piece of bread at the end. Everybody files past the priest and received this bread, anditoros it's call, which symbolizes the body of Christ. So he cut it up into squares like that and then called his friends into his tent to participate in this Greek service that he was having, and it was a great success. Everybody was taking it, and everybody was getting bombed off eating bread! The word got around so that one black GI tried to join in with them, to go in to participate, and he was stopped by a sergeant who asked him where he was going. He said he was going in to participate in this Greek service. The sergeant said, "You don't look Greek to me." He said, "I am." The sergeant said, "What is your name?" He said, "Tyrone Popanopolis." The sergeant, "Well speak some Greek to me." And the guy said, "Happo pie pine happo pie kikki." The guy said, "Pass, Greek!"

Sam always thought my father missed his calling. Instead of being a pushcart peddler in the

United States he should have had a cottage industry of making this Mastika-soaked bread. It would have been a terrific hit, he said. He knew he would have bought quite a few loaves of it. He said it was the only way he knew that he could drink and eat at the same time, and keep it down!

**RITCHIE:** And Sam will be one of the speakers at the American Legion tribute to you this week?

**TAMES:** Yes, Sam's going to be the lead off speaker. He's got a few things to say. He reminded me about the time Sam had written a story about Cordell Hull's Under Secretary of State, Sumner Wells. In his story, Sam wrote that Sumner and his wife liked to bathe together in a huge double tub. They faced one another and bathed and talked. So I went over and asked to take a picture. With great delicacy and diplomacy, I said I would agree to shoot them from the back. But of course, naturally, I didn't get the picture. But at that time that was really risque. The whole idea of a husband and wife bathing together was really a little off the wall.

Well, I've been thinking more and more about this dinner, tribute as they call it. It's a tribute to me in name, however I think it's more of a symbol for all the first generation of immigrants who are in this great country of ours and the opportunities that we shared, and that still continue as we see in this latest wave of Vietnamese, and Eastern Asians, and South Americans. The dream is here, and it is possible. I'm going to use an example of that. One of the young men, a young black whose name is Ron Thomas, is going to be there as our guest. Three years ago that young man was bagging groceries down here in Safeway. He was putting some groceries in the trunk of our car and saw some of my gear, my lights than things, and he asked my wife if she was a photographer. She said, "No, my husband is." He said, "Well, I've always wanted to be a photographer and I wonder whether he would talk to me." Fran said, "He talks to everybody. He hasn't refused to talk to anybody yet! So you just come on up, make an appointment." He called me, and he came in with his pictures. He showed me what he had done, and what his ambitions were. I could sense that his command of the English language was not on par with his age, that although he was in his twenties he was speaking like a nine or ten year old in the normal white schools that I have gone to. I could sense that he didn't have the qualifications, or a background of any kind for photography. I looked at his pictures and I encouraged him, but at the same time I told him: don't give up his job bagging groceries if he expected to eat.

About six months later he came back, with much improved quality of work. Then I sent him back, and gave him some encouragement. I told him that if he could spare the time, and if he wanted to follow me in the summer, he could follow me around, and see how I worked. I could give him some tips and explain to him what I was doing. He did so, in fact, he stayed for a whole year. We literally had to drive him away because of the union problems. We either had to drive him away or hire him, and the *Times* was not about to hire him. So he went off on his own. To make a long story short: in three years he went from bagging groceries to having an exclusive interview with the president of the United States. So it can be done, but you have to work hard and you have to put your nose to the

grindstone and apply yourself. But it can be done. He'll be right there in the audience and I might even ask him to stand.

**RITCHIE:** Is he working as a photographer now?

**TAMES:** He's freelancing around town now. The ironic thing is that he's recommending me! That's what really gets me! He called me up one day and said, "Look, I can't do this job for this advertising agency in California, but when they call, don't sell yourself cheap, because I've been charging them a thousand dollars." I haven't charged a thousand dollars for an assignment in my life! With all the years I have! So I'm selling myself cheap, I don't realize what the market is out there for the talent.

I've helped him, and I've helped others. I look to Ron Thomas and to Al Shuster, who is now foreign editor of the *Los Angeles Times* as two of my greatest proteges. Al Shuster went from my office boy, carrying my gear--I hired him for the *Times* when he was seventeen as my office boy. I've helped quite a few people. I've never been reluctant to let anybody know what I know. Unlike when I started, when everything was kept as a close guarded secret, I cut loose. I figure, if I let you know everything that I know, I can still beat you, because you're just trying to catch up to me. Unless you take that quantitive leap like the Japanese, you're always going to be right there. You've got to think. That's the big thing I have found about the young people today, most of them, they're content to be "as good as." That really guts me.

**RITCHIE:** But not "better than."

**TAMES:** Not "better than." Those are the three words that really gut me. God almighty, if I here those words, "as good as," I'm ready to fight or to turn around and walk away. It is just not in my nature to be that way. If you're only as good as someone, don't even say it. It's just like winning second place in a photo contest. I said it's just like kissing your sister. It's very pleasant, but it doesn't lead to anything.

**RITCHIE:** When you have someone like Ron Thomas in tow, what kinds of things would you tell him? What kinds of things would you try to train him to think as a photographer?

**TAMES:** Basically, more than anything else to young ones, and particularly minorities who have been depressed, like the blacks, they have a built-in inferiority complex: you have to take command. The moment you work into a situation, and you are a photographer, you are taking over. You are in command. You are the one who is telling them what they are supposed to do. You do it either by direct command, if you can get away with it, or you do it by showing, gently. If people have their own ideas about what they want and how they look, you say, "Fine, I'll do everything that you say, but afterwards I want to do it my way, and then we'll let the editor or let you decide which one is the

best." It satisfies me, it satisfies you. So you've got to be able to work with people. This is one of the secrets of my success with the members of Congress. I have always been very, very careful about overstepping my bounds. I have always prided myself that I am able to go to the limit before I have to back off, and know when I'm approaching the limit in pushing for any particular thing, and then back off. That way I maintain friendships. Ah, well.

**RITCHIE:** I wanted to show you one of your pictures, speaking of first generation immigrants. Do you remember this picture you took of Harry Bridges, ten years ago, 1978? Bridges gave a talk at the National Portrait Gallery.

**TAMES:** I'll be damned, yes.

**RITCHIE:** The reason why I brought this photograph is because I was one of the people attending that conference, and it was the first time I met you. I think you were the only photographer who came to that meeting.

**TAMES:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** And while he was giving that speech, I recall you moved silently around the room, and there were balconies up above and every once in a while you would appear on a balcony and snap a picture, and then come down below. You must have snapped thirty or more photographs, it seemed to me at least as I was watching. And then the next day this picture of a cocky, self-assured looking Harry Bridges appeared in the *Times*, just the right pose, the chin up in the air.

**TAMES:** There again, see I had photographed Bridges before, usually in a more defiant character at hearings, or maybe at a strike or in some other situation. He had mellowed, I guess we all mellow as we get older, at least we're supposed to. Anyway, although he had mellowed, he was still defiant. He knew his own mind, and he represented his union well. It's amazing that you should bring this here, because I had forgotten about that incident, yet I remember it now very well. I used to enjoy those lectures over at the Portrait Gallery. Gosh, maybe I ought to go over there and give one.

**RITCHIE:** That's true, that lecture was called a "Living Portrait." He was telling his life, and they were videotaping it, and you were photographing it at the same time. I wondered the next day when the article appeared in the paper, I wondered out of all the pictures that you took, how do you choose the "right" one.

**TAMES:** Well, there again, I don't remember this incidence, but there are very few pictures that you can show me that I don't remember making them. I picked this one because I thought it fitted into the article physically, that is the picture itself, and it also gave a little bit more than just the--what shall we call it--well, it gave more of a portrait of him, still a defiant, chin up guy. I'm sure that this was

made just at a moment when he was making some outlandish statement and was reacting to the audience. I knew he loved to make statements where he knew that the audience would respond. In this particular case he threw that chin up. Also what attracted me at that time, if you will notice, is this very outlandish tie that he was wearing, which I thought was part of his defiance, and I wanted to show that.

**RITCHIE:** Even the article mentions how "dapper" he was dressed that day, but the time really fills up that picture.

**TAMES:** Yes, it's the most dominant thing there. It looks like a dinosaur's tongue or something, it's a huge thing.

**RITCHIE:** And he's obviously standing on the podium, so you're shooting up at him.

**TAMES:** Yes, he's on the podium and I'm shooting up, so this is a reaction. I caught him just at the moment when there was a reaction by the crowd, or he was listening to a question that was being asked that he didn't particularly care for, someone was reminding him of something that he didn't particualrly like. He threw that chin up in a defiant sort of way and semi-closed his eyes, as if he was thinking, but really that's a gesture of defiance. Closing your eyes, you're not really thinking, you already know what answer you're going to give. It's just part of the acting. You know, a good orator, so much of it is acting in order to grab your audience, or grab your committee. I've seen it happen so many times. Then again you get some people who are so intellectually bright, who just cannot seem to do it, it's amazing. /Paul/ Sarbanes is one, Senator Sarbanes. Senator Sarbanes is a very, very intellectual man. He's very well read, and he can write well, but God bless it, he can't give a speech! He cannot project that. Sometimes I think, God, I wish I could give that speech for him! It's been unfortunate that we have had members of Congress that way. The Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two years ago. . . .

**RITCHIE:** Percy or Lugar?

**TAMES:** /Richard/ Lugar was very smart, very intellectual, a very fine senator, but he doesn't get the press. He doesn't get the attention. Yet he's well read, he writes well. He makes sense in committee hearings. We have a tendency. . . I think one of the greatest inventions is the world has been this automatic clicker /remote control/ on tv. You sit back there and the moment somebody says something, click, you click them right off. The moment somebody says Lugar, you have a tendency to think of a 9mm pistol and click you cut it off. That's a shame, but that's what happens.

**RITCHIE:** I wanted to ask you again about a picture like this one of Bridges, where you've taken twenty pictures or more of one incident, did you normally just present one to the Times, or did you give them a sampling?

**TAMES:** No, no. Normally we tried to give them three: one, a single column; two, two columns, if it's one person; and then three is just a straight, dramatic head, just a big head. This is a one column deep, so it could go either way. In fact, sometimes we get away with just two pictures by giving them a good deep one column this way, so they can come in and cut the head off and just use the head if they decided that that's what it calls for in this space. It depends on the dressing. Also, in a case like this where it's a feature story, a feature picture, you also try to dress the page. In other words, if you have two good pictures of him, one looking right and one looking left, you send them both, because you don't know how it's going to look. In this particular case, he's looking to the right of the reader, which is the correct way, into the story. Now, if you had this flipped and he's looking off the page, it would be distracting, and they wouldn't use it. See, they wouldn't use it. Now, of course in the old days, in a case like that and it was the only picture they had, they would just take his head and flip it, and you wouldn't know whether it was the right or left. But if they left the tie in and a few other things, you can distinguish that they are flipped. But you usually try to give them three: looking right, looking left, and a good two-column in the center. Sometimes more, depending, but usually right about that.

**RITCHIE:** I wondered, did you ever regret, sometimes, when a picture you had taken wasn't used?

**TAMES:** Oh, yes, many times. Of course, that was my fault. Unlike the young ones--see, I had an advantage and a disadvantage. I never worked in New York, I worked in Washington, so I didn't know how the picture desk worked. Now, many times I made pictures down here that were exclusive, that were very newsworthy and on top of it, and I would send them up to New York and they never would get used, because the people in New York didn't recognize what the story was about, and they didn't recognize how important this particular picture was.

I made a picture when a Republican candidate eight years ago dropped out of the race. He was a Congressman.

**RITCHIE:** Phil Crane?

**TAMES:** Not Crane, no, it was another one. The one who was a very religious one. He had an office on the first floor of the Longworth Building. Oh, God, what was his name?

**RITCHIE:** He was running for president?

**TAMES:** He was running for the nomination, and he backed out right on public tv. I happened to be there. I followed him that day. I didn't know that he was going to say this, but the moment he finished on tv, the McNeil-Lehrer Report, they offered him a cup of coffee, and he cupped it in his hands and was bringing it up, and was blowing into it. The look on his face of weariness and

resignation--I sent that up. Then I sent a regular talking shot, when he actually made the announcement on tv. Well, I didn't call New York. I sent them two, I should have only sent them one, of him blowing into the coffee, because to me that was a more dramatic shot. But they went with the talking shot. Yeah, I remember that, I never forgot that one.

**RITCHIE:** What is the role of the photo editor? Your photo editor gave you the award at the Kennedy Center the other night, and that raised a question in my mind: what's the relationship between the photo editor and the photographer.

**TAMES:** Well, of course, there are a lot of assistants. She's the picture editor, and then there are editors on the various desks. The *Times* now has gotten so big that they have regional editors. They have one that does sports, one that assigns photographers to travel the country, or picks up freelancers, then there's one that does the domestic, metropolitan area, and so forth. But the relationship between the two is that you shoot it--and here in Washington we have the advantage that we print it and then we send what we like. Now, of course, if you send up your raw film, or contacts, or just contacts, then he or she will look at the prints and decide which picture they like. It should be a very close relationship between the two, so you could call up and say, "Look, this is what I think," and let them decide. See, we're looking at it from the picture point of view, and they're looking at it from the page, how does it fit and how does it dress up the rest of the page. Unless the picture is so outstanding that the picture is used and then everything else has to be worked around it. We've had occasions where they have said, "We're holding that story because we need some art with it. Go ahead and make something on it." And we try to do what we can on that.

**RITCHIE:** Have you ever tried to second-guess the photo editor? You know that they like certain types of pictures, and you aim for that?

**TAMES:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Many times. The late Lester Markel, the editor of the Sunday department of the *New York Times*, who had a finger in everything, used to pick the pictures for the *New York Times* magazine cover, and so forth. I knew that he used to love silhouettes, and he used to love chandeliers and mirrors, reflections, that type of thing. I used to always try to do something like that, that would please his eye. Silhouettes particularly, I'd always try to get something silhouetted to make it stand out. Yeah, you do that. You learn to work with your editor. He's the final arbitrator of what goes in, so you have to have a good relationship. You can call up and ask, "Why did you do this?" "Why didn't you do that?"

Sometimes they'd leave things out of captions. We did it just recently. We had a piece on the State Department's lawyer, the counsel for the State Department. I got a very nice, moody shot of him, leaning up against his desk, in front of his desk, with his legs crossed, and some papers under his arms. He had folded his arm, his flag was over his right shoulder, and there were some pictures on the wall. It was a beautiful picture, but he's looking at a tv set. I made the tv set prominent in the foreground, shot

so that on the left you could it was a tv set and he's looking right at it. The caption read, "Sawyer in his office today." Well! And I went to great lengths to describe the fact that he keeps three tvs going on in his office all the time. One on CNN for the debate in the House and Senate, and one for any committee hearings that are going on. So anytime something attracts his attention, he can zap in on it. We failed to mention it. To me, that took away from the whole picture.

Then another thing we had, just recently, I made a picture of the Secretary of Defense, /Frank/ Carlucci, up with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral /William Crowe/. They were testifying before the House Armed Services Committee. Just before they started testifying on the Defense Department budget, just two days previously the Secretary of the Navy /James Webb/ had resigned, and it was still hot news. So the Admiral leans over and puts his hand on the microphone and leans in and whispers to the Secretary: "What's my answer if they ask me about why the Secretary of the Navy quit?" And Carlucci laughed and said, "Just keep your mouth shut." Well, I put that in my caption, and we didn't use it. But we used the picture of his holding his hand over the mike.

**RITCHIE:** Are there many occasions when you feel that the photo editor has a particular slant, or a dislike of people or groups? Do they ever choose pictures out of a particular bias?

**TAMES:** Well, yeah, they do have some. But I never catered to their whims. If it's there, I'll do it, but I'm not looking for something just to justify some preconceived idea that somebody might have.

**RITCHIE:** I don't know of any examples on the Times, but I know that people have complained that some newspapers run unflattering pictures of Republicans or Democrats, or this politician never gets a good picture in that paper.

**TAMES:** The only reason why he doesn't get a good picture is because he doesn't make a good picture! Some people make good pictures, and some don't. It's just a quirk of the camera. Sometimes I will look at people through my lens, and then look at them with my eye, and look through the lens again, and it seems like it's two different people. It just does something. We call it "photogenic." Well, there is something there. Some try all their lives to get something, and they never get a good shot, or never have anything that really pleases them.

No, of all the years that I have been in the business, I've never heard of any one person, photographer, going after some member of a political party just simply because they didn't like them. I mean, I will admit that there are times when say the Ku Klux Klan or some of the more obvious brutal sheriffs and deputies in the South during the Civil Rights fights, that we photographers would try to catch their most unflattering angle, if we were able to without being too obvious at it. Yeah, we've done that. We make sure the background doesn't do them any good. But by in large we try to bury our personal feelings, otherwise if you don't you're never going to come up with anything that's worthwhile.

And once the word gets around that you're doing that, why. . . . But in Washington I've never heard of anybody doing that, or getting a reputation for deliberately going out of their way to make someone look bad. Although there are photographers who earned their living deliberately making cops look bad, or society in general look bad.

**RITCHIE:** The other thing I remember from that night when Harry Bridges spoke was that afterwards there was a reception downstairs in the hall where all the paintings of the presidents were hung. I was with Jim Ketchum, the Senate Curator, and you came over and walked us passed all of the portraits of the presidents that you had photographed, and told us each of the quirks of these presidents. Eisenhower was sensitive about his earlobes, as I recall you said, and Johnson always wanted to have his left side taken.

**TAMES:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** It was a wonderful account of the vanities of famous men. I wondered how much as a photographer you had to take those vanities into account. Did you run the risk of encountering the ire of some of them if you didn't take the pictures they wanted?

**TAMES:** Oh, yeah, sure you ran the risk. LBJ used to blame me for every picture that he considered unflattering that ran in the *New York Times*. He never bothered to look at the credit. I just caught hell, because I was his friend, and I was supposed to make sure that these types of things did not get in, that's all there was to it. It was almost impossible to avoid the left side of Lyndon Johnson's face, because he deliberately presented that every time that he possibly could. At one time I told him that if he could walk on the stage backwards, just so his left side showed, he would do it. If you notice, at every one of his rallies, that when he walked on stage he came from the right and walked on stage with the left side of his face showing to the audience. He always entered from the right of the audience, so it was always the left side of his face that was showing when he walked across the stage.

**RITCHIE:** Do you recall that night you told a story about taking a businessman or a banker in to see Johnson?

**TAMES:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Could you tell me that story again?

**TAMES:** It was a group of IBM-ers who were going through the Hill that day. He was Majority Leader or Vice President, one or the other. We went through his office, and I told them before we went in that he was going to give them his "sound dollar" pitch, where he started talking about "what makes Amurrrica great: it's the dollar that makes Amurrrica great." You could see these business people's eyes start sparkling when he started talking. Then he would take out a dollar bill and

very dramatically flattened it out and used his fingers as if he was cutting with scissors: "This much for defense, and this much for that." He was showing how much of the dollar it took to run the federal government, and their eyes would light up.

But just before we went in, the public relations man for the group was also about six foot five, big outdoor type, and he asked me if I could get a picture of him with Johnson. I said, "Sure, I'll make the other pictures and I'll introduce you to him and make a picture of you." He said, "Well, before we go in there I wanted to let you know that. . . " I said, "Don't tell me that you have a favorite side of your face." He said, "Yes." I said, "Which side?" He said, "The left." I said, "No way. LBJ thinks the left side of his face is best, so we're going to stand with his left side showing, your right showing." He said, "Well, I'll take care of it." I said, "You take care of it, I'll photograph it, but I know what's going to happen."

We went in and I introduced him to the Vice President, and I said, "Can I get a picture?" And LBJ said, "Sure." He got up and buttoned his coat, and just as he was buttoning his coat, this friend of mine grabs him by the elbow and spins him around so that his right side is showing, and the other fellow stepped in left. Just as fast, LBJ spins him around. Then they spin around again. Finally I said, "Hold it guys! If you both want the left side of your face to show, stand back to back!" And LBJ said, "No, George, I don't mind, you know that I don't mind." I said, "Yeah, I know you don't mind." So we made the picture with LBJ's right side of his face showing. He was very unhappy with that, I could tell that. I said, "Now, Mr. Vice President, that was nice behind your desk, but let's make a different picture over here by the fire place. I think this is a nice mantle here." He said, "Oh, sure, George." We went over there and he stands with the left side of his face showing, and this time I signaled to my buddy just to go along with it. He was smiling and shaking hands and I was banging away. Then as we were going out the door, LBJ put his arms around my shoulder and gave me a big squeeze. He looked down and said, "You pick the best one, you <u>hear</u>?"

When I had them printed, this friend of mine said, "Jeez, I'd love to get it autographed." I said, "He'll never autograph that one with the right side of his face showing." So what I did was to take a mounting board and lightly glue the picture by the mantle place, with LBJ's left side showing, and put it on the board. Then I took it in and had LBJ look at it. He liked it and he signed underneath. When I left the room, I just removed that picture and put the other one on, and everyone was happy. That's called diplomacy.

**RITCHIE:** Were there many members of Congress who had vanities about how they wanted to be photographed?

**TAMES:** Not that I'm aware of to the extent that LBJ did. There were quite a few who would joke about not having had a good picture made, I'd do this or do that, but I never really had any problems.

**RITCHIE:** I've heard that Johnson particular was interested in getting a good coverage from the *New York Times* and cultivated a lot of their correspondents, and was very close to William S. White in the 1950s. Did you feel that he sort of cultivated you as well?

**TAMES:** Oh, yes. He cultivated me and he cultivated all photographers. I think White was just one of his favorites and I think I probably was one of his favorites. The reason for it, of course, from my angle was I love to joke, I love humor, and I use humor quite a bit. I would tell him what jokes I'd been hearing and what was happening around the Hill, and he would laugh and tell me a few things. And I knew him for so long, from when he was over there as a member of the House, so that had something to do with it.

Yes, he had favorite photographers, like Okimoto, who was his official photographer. He kept calling him "that Jap," but he didn't mean it in a derogatory sense. "Where's my Jap?" he say when he wanted some pictures made. He didn't ask for Okimoto. He probably couldn't even pronounce it. He'd say, "Where's my Jap?"

I'll never forget the time after he became president and he called in Pierre Salinger, who was still working as press secretary. "Pierre," he said, "I want you to get my Jap and bring him over here and take some pictures." "Yes, sir, Mr. President." Pierre didn't even question what the president was asking. Then he went into the press office and said, "Who the hell is this Jap that he's asking about?" He found out it was Okimoto, who was working for USIA at that time, and had followed LBJ when LBJ took that tour of the world and ended up in Pakistan and got the mule driver a car and all that stuff. Okimoto was along, and Vice President Johnson liked what Okimoto did. I think Okimoto presented him with a huge album of all the pictures that were made by him and the staff. That's how Oki got the job over there as the first official White House Photographer.

**RITCHIE:** When they created an official position, how did the rest of the photographers feel? Did they see that as competition in a sense?

**TAMES:** Well, no. We saw it both as competition and a source of pride, that finally still photography was becoming recognized as a force. We had pride in having one of us make it. In fact, I make no bones about it, that was my ambition to have that title, personal photographer to the President of the United States. I thought, hell, you couldn't do any better than that. I was perfectly willing to do it for Hubert Humphrey, and I would have become the photographer for Hubert if he'd have made it. Then some of Jimmy Carter's staff people asked me to come over: would I like to go over there and work? They also asked Bernie Boston. But when they asked me, I told them yes, I was interested, until I found out that Carter didn't want to give me the title. He didn't want the Imperial Presidency, so he said. But he was willing to let me run the place. I said, "I'll stay where I am." As far as I was concerned there's not enough glory or glamor in the job to compensate for the fact that you were doing the work without getting the proper credit. I guess we all like a title of some kind.

**RITCHIE:** Has there been a tendency of presidents to try to get the newspapers to publish their official photographs rather than candid shots taken by the press photographers?

**TAMES:** Oh, yes. Very much. This goes back to the times when Harris & Ewing had a lock on it. Up until my picture of Eisenhower they had a lock on the president's pictures. They had every president's picture there, God, I believe from Lincoln on up. They would sell them, and they would make thousands of prints, and make quite a bit of money out of it. Also the state of the art was such that you could only take pictures by elaborate set ups, and so forth, that took a lot of time. Of course, it's reached a point now where we're getting so much media coverage. When I showed up at the White House first before World War II, it was practically deserted. If you got five, six still photographers, you had a crowd. Normally, you had three. Today, on a simple, routine assignment, you'd see eight or nine.

Just last Friday I was at the announcement by the Postal Rate Commission, recommending the increase of a U.S. stamp from twenty-two cents to twenty-five cents, and there were eleven tv cameras there! For a simple little old announcement! And four still photographers. So you have an increase not only there but everywhere in Washington. The media has increased. Just look at the Congressional Directory, with the names of the newspapers represented. And today, with instant communications, my goodness. I understand that the Architect of the Capitol turned down a request by the tv companies to put a huge satellite dish on the roof of the Capitol, so they could beam to world everything that was going on, right directly from the Capitol. Gosh, if this is happening, you can imagine how much more is demanded of photographers.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned Harris & Ewing. They were an old-time Washington photographic studio. I gather they must have kept someone standing outside the White House regularly, because I've seen loads of their picture--they all seem to be the same pose--of somebody coming in or out the White House door.

**TAMES:** That was all you could get. You see, when I showed up in 1940, by that time photographers were allowed to hang around the door leading into the press room, which was in the West Wing of the White House, where the president's office is. Previous to Roosevelt, the only place where the photographers could stand was on West Executive Avenue, down the bottom of the steps. They used to sit there, when they would hear that some king or queen or some big personage was coming, and try to get a shot of them as they came in and out of the gate, from outside. Then when they were allowed inside, all dignitaries were always escorted through the west door of the West Wing, why we always used to stand them right there at the door, with their hands on the doorknob, or just standing there talking to one another, before they went in or after they left, after seeing the president. We'd just stop them there. We'd just stand there and just wait. Yes, we spent a lot of time staked out that way.

The room that the photogaphers had as their office at the White House, when I first showed up,

was a little room which we called the "dog house," because it really was like a kennel. It was six feet wide and about twenty-five feet long. It was on the side of the White House where today the present offices of the assistant press secretaries are, inside the little building. In other words, it was in that little extension where Roosevelt had his swimming pool, which is now the press room. When you come up to the dais, where the press secretary gives his briefing, directly behind him was where the old room was. We stayed in there, and we literally had no chairs or nothing. We just had a changing room, we could go in and change our four-by-five holders and re-load and unload. The way the wire services would send their film back to the office was they would go into this little room and put their exposed film in little light-tight boxes and tape them and put a caption on them, and then walk out to the gate and wait for the messenger to come from the wires and they'd take it back for printing.

We weren't even allowed into the press room. It wasn't until Harry Truman became president that he went on an inspection tour of the West Wing of the White House, after he had been in office for about a month, and he went into the press office. There Merriman Smith, who was then the dean of the White House press corps, escorted him around and showed him the offices. And Harry Truman said, "Well, where are the photographers?" Merriman Smith said, "Oh, Mr. President, we don't let them in here. We just keep them outside in the dog house." Harry Truman said, "I want them in here." That was the first time we were allowed to come in. Sometimes the press reporters would suffer us to come in when the weather got cold or rainy outside, but they had a bar: photographers were not entitled to come in to the press room. Harry Truman made us first-class citizens. That's why I've always claimed an affection for him. He made us first-class citizens.

**RITCHIE:** How do you account for the reporters' bias or feelings against the photographers?

**TAMES:** Traditional. I've always claimed, to be very facetious, that the photogaphers were the asshole of the Fourth Estate. Through us all the crap wends out, and we received all the abuse, because by and large we were a craft in a literary profession. We were craftsmen, we could operate this little gizmo, this little thing called a camera, and take images. But it would only take minimal training to get someone to use one of these boxes. The writers came out of backgrounds in journalism schools--while photography schools were unknown as part of journalism. It wasn't until the advent of Life magazine that everyone started thinking of photography as an art, and as a visual adjunct to the writing.

Of course, the writers always kept their numbers small. They were very jealous of their proximity to the president. They still are, to this day. They become prima donnas themselves, and start telling the world how the presidency should be run. You can see that today in some of their writings. But the presidents, by and large I have found, felt more at ease around still photogaphers, and photographers in general. Today the photogaphers are just as well educated as the writers or they can't get the job, at least around here. And I think it was just a class distinction, and it has only been fairly recent that when a photographer went out with a reporter, that you were always introduced as "my photographer." We used to resent that. "This is my photographer, and we're doing this story." Until

we photogaphers started introducing the reporters as "my reporter." Then that kind of took the edge off of that.

I think the reporters also looked upon us as infringing on their time. Say if they had fifteen minutes for an interview, they thought that the photographer distracted because of his movements and so forth. Where I've always maintained that we added to the interview. At least particularly in my case, I used to ask questions myself that I thought that the writer hadn't asked. I brought them up in such a way that it wasn't taking away the job from the reporter, but at the same time I was asking the questions.

**RITCHIE:** How did the accommodations at the Capitol compare with the accommodations at the White House for photographers?

**TAMES:** Oh, the Capitol accommodations are sensational. We can't complain. The set-ups today, with free access particularly to the combined press galleries--you know, this tradition extended to the galleries at the Capitol. The photographers were not members of, or allowed to be members of, or tolerated in the galleries. We were not allowed to go up into that area. It was for reporters only, and members of the gallery. It wasn't until we formed our own gallery, and petitioned the Congress to be allowed, that we were allowed to come into the main gallery and even look over the railing. No, that's why you have such a proliferation of galleries. If the writers had allowed the radio-TV, and the magazines, and the photographers, to join their gallery, there would only be one gallery today. That's what the Congress tried to do in the last four years: consolidate the galleries into one, where they should be. But once you get an entrenched bureaucracy, and the various superintendents who are seeing their jobs in jeopardy, they didn't want to give up up their galleries and combine.

But today in the gallery, with flashing on the monitor who's going to appear in the gallery and at what time and on what suhject, everybody's invited to go there. The set-up we have in the Dirksen Building, with our labs and our studio where we bring the members down for portraits, and TV also uses that for interviews, a lot of space is occupied and a lot of money is spent on the media.

I for one wouldn't mind seeing the Congress ask for rent, because we are occupying the space, and we are their guests, so to speak. Of course, the *New York Times* has its own phones. We have telephones and our own lines. We use them when we're calling back and forth. However, there are hundreds of reporters up there who use the government's phones every day. It's sort of a subsidy for the media. Yet you try to tell them it's a subsidy and they rear back and tell you no.

**RITCHIE:** Well, it's an old tradition. Congress always provided pens and paper for the reporters, and eventually typewriters and telegraph machines.

**TAMES:** That started early when reporters suggested this, particularly for some of their poor

colleagues, who were getting paid by the word that they were writing and were frequently down on their luck. They used to sleep up there in the gallery! They spent all night in the gallery. When I was a young man, a lot of fellows slept out in the gallery and got up and washed in the wash stands in the morning and went downstairs and had coffee. When they had the bar in the Capitol, they used to tell me that they would go down there and have a free lunch. That was up until fairly recently, until the prohibition went into effect, there was a bar on the first floor of the Capitol, down on the House side, where the old barbershop used to be. There's a hearing room there now.

Yeah, they provided the pens, they provided the space. This just led into more and more, step by step. All of a sudden you find young reporters showing up *demanding* these things. Now you've reached a point where it's part of life. It's just like reporters going into an enclave of poverty in some part of the United States and the first thing that strikes you is the forest of TV antennas. How can they be so poor if they've got TVs? TVs have become necessities. We change. Hell, yes, I have seen members of the press who actually have gone off their rocker up there. They think they are members of the House or Senate in that their advice should be taken. I think it's gone about as far as it can go, and I think that a fee for use of the space--there's nothing in the Constitution that says that free space has to be allocated for the media. The only step after that is to feed them, and then they'd better write favorable articles or they'll cut them off, and that's a danger that we have to be very careful with here.

**RITCHIE:** Did you have a desk or working space in the press photographers gallery? How did they work that?

**TAMES:** No, no, we have a communal arrangement. There are about three desks and a long table where we put our gear. There's also lockers where we can keep valuable gear. Valuable gear has been stolen from us around the Capitol over the years, so now we try to keep everything under lock and key.

The only slots that are marked for the *New York Times* up in the Capitol are for the reporters. We use it also, but it's one little desk and three phones in a corner of the press gallery. I think maybe one phone line is for our direct computer to the office, and the other two are for conversation. Then of course there are other desks allocated to other reporters on a seniority basis, for the ones who cover Capitol Hill regularly. Sarah McClendon has a desk, for example, because I know her. Her desk is right next to the *Times*. There are others, the wire services and individual newspapers. The *Washington Post* has about as big a space as the *New York Times*. Some of the other papers have individual desks, which are their desks. I don't know whether they were bought by the individuals or they are provided by the Capitol but at least the phone service we provide ourselves, and I think we are perfectly willing to buy our own furniture too, if it had to be. It's a convenience. It works both ways up there. By having the desk there you know that the reporters can spend a lot more time there, instead of having to come downtown to write their story, they can just write it directly from there and have it filed.

**RITCHIE:** Was the gallery a good place to pick up gossip about what was going on?

**TAMES:** Oh, God, yes. The gallery plus the place I loved, and I picked up more stuff there, was the press table in the restaurant on the Senate side of the Capitol. I'd have lunch there every day. I made a point of having lunch there every day. The same gang, usually the same bunch. We'd bat it back and forth. You'd pick up a nugget here, a nugget there, and you'd put it together just like an intelligence service.

But my greatest asset was that I was at the Capitol every morning no later than 8:30, sometimes 8 o'clock, about 8:15 was average. And I'd walk back to the Senators' Dining Room, and I'd see Mike Mansfield and Senator Aiken, Senator Stennis, Senator Long, Kefauver, some of my favorites who were early risers and would get in that early. Senator Stennis was one who had his coffee and his breakfast up there in a corner--he may still be doing it to this day, although he's so crippled--but he would spread out the daily paper and mark articles so his staff would clip them out and follow up and these particular stories. I'd have breakfast with him, or I'd be having breakfast with him and I'd walk over and say hello and ask him what he was doing that day. We just bat it back and forth, and as a result I was able to pick up what was going on, and the feel and the drift of the Senate, which way the Senate was going on various issues. Of course, there weren't that many issues, either. I will admit that it's so overwhelming today, there's so much legislation, so much happening. If it was happening then, I didn't know it. But I thought I knew everything that was going on, and it was a little more leisurely pace. It was work, but it wasn't as frenzied as it is today. So many things happening, one on top of another.

I'd ask a few questions, and have coffee, and talk some more. I'd pass on what I heard. I would have already read the *Washington Post*, because I wasn't getting the *Times* until I got to the Hill myself. I didn't get a chance to read my own paper until a little later. But I always did get the *Post* at home and I knew what was happening. I'd comment. I'd say to one senator, "Well, what do you think about what David Broder said today?" Or "What do you think about what such and such a person has written?" "What do you think of the editorial in the *Post* today?" "What did you think of the editorial in the *Times*?" "What did you think of the editorial in the *Baltimore Sun*?" When they were in the field, the individual senators, I'd ask them what did they think of it, and they'd let me know. And it was on a personal basis. I got information just for my own satisfaction and my own judgment of what was going on, not necessarily for the office, except on occasion when I got a real good piece, I would pass it on to the reporters.

Invariably I would say, "This is what I hear, but you'd better check it out." Because I learned early, one time I told somebody to check it out, and they didn't check it out. It ran as a headline in the *New York Times* the next day. It was true, but it frightened the hell out of me. It was just my perception of what was happening, not any facts. I don't know whether the reporter was being facetious or not, but I walked up to him with a great big smile and said, "Well, you checked it out and it

was true." He said, "Oh, I didn't check it out, I just went on what you told me." I said, "You what!?" He said, "Yes, I went on what you told me." I said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Listen, George, I discovered early in my career not to dig too deep into a good story. It might turn out to be untrue." Well, I never forgot that! That was a lesson I never forgot. I made a point of always telling them: "Be sure to check this out."

But most of the time I just kept it to myself. I'd pass it on to the other senators, you know, this is the feeling. Or someone would ask me: "What do you hear, George?" "This is what I heard, what do you think about it? What do you think are the chances of this bill? What do you hear?" I'd say, "Well, this is what I hear." I don't know if they were just trying to get from me the viewpoint of the media, or if they know that I talked to quite a few members. I enjoyed it, too. You know, it gave you a sense of power. It surprises me, its a feeling of power, psychologically I guess, when you know some big secret and everybody doesn't know it. You know that something is about to happen, and you can't tell anyone.

It just reminds me of during World War II when some of our correspondents were writing these super-secret memos to *Time*, Inc. They would send up confidential and secret messages to the editors in New York, a few select ones, about what they were hearing here in Washington, or what was told to them by the military here about certain operations, or certain things that were going to happen, certain new weapons, radar, which was hush-hush. I knew all about radar. The big to-do one time was they spread the word that they had the answer to the German tanks. They were going to really take care of them with rocket propelled grenade launchers; they called it the bazooka. Hell, I knew what a bazooka was when nobody else knew about the bazooka.

How did an office boy know? Very simple. Everything was hush-hush, yeah. They'd bring the secretary in, who takes this all down, or when the guy types it they have to make twenty copies. So who did they give it to? They give it to the office boy to run it off on the machine? So I'd run off twenty-one! Get one for myself. I'd read it, I wouldn't tell anyone, and I'd destroy it later, because I'd probably get fired if I got caught. I often wondered if this was the weak link in a lot of information that's leaked. You can make all these elaborate arrangements, and then you send it to the printer, and the printer leaks it!

Mary Malloy the office manager would sit there and she'd count as I ran it off the machine, because that was my job to run it off the ditto machine. "How many are you going to make off this, Mary?" "Oh, we're going to make thirteen of those." "Fine, okay. One, two, three." And up to thirteen, and then I'd run it through one more time as I was counting thirteen. Or, if I didn't do it that way, I would take the stencil master, and it was very inky, you would take it off that damn thing and drop it in a special bag and drop it in the trash. I would retrieve it and read it, and then drop it back in the trash. I told one of my friends one day what I was doing. He said, "Shit, don't you know that your fingerprints are all over that thing." I said, "But they're all over everything anyway. I handle it, they

know I handle it." "Got another one Mary?" She'd come over and say, "Okay, shove this one through." I'd shove it through, and that way I'd find out what was going on.

I knew a great deal about what was happening in the miliary, as much as they'd let the media know--particularly *Time* magazine, because *Time* magazine was publishing a week later, so it was news by that time. What they were telling *Time* two or three days in advance was secret. God, a hell of a lot of memoes were going back and forth on the timing of the invasion of Europe, at that time they didn't say Normandy. I don't remember the word Normandy, but I do remember invasion, and a lot of plans, and a lot of preparations, and a lot of artificial bulwarks or docks, supersecret artificial docks. I don't know whether the Germans knew about it that much in advance, or whether it was a complete surprise to them, but I knew about it. It was pretty heady stuff for a twenty-one year old. It was just like fine wine, I guess. It's been a very interesting career, when you consider it all. I just fell into it.

**RITCHIE:** You're in a city where knowledge is so significant. Knowledge is power in many ways.

**TAMES:** Knowledge is power. Knowledge is money. And words are power. That's what I keep trying to tell these blacks. "So you want to keep black English, beautiful," I'd say. "Keep black English, but don't speak it when you go out in the public. Keepit for yourselves, like I kept Greek for myself." The moment you try to start speaking black English and carry on a conversation on a high level, nobody's going to listen to what you say. And the English language today is <u>the</u> language. Everybody speaks it. It's the <u>lingua franca</u> of the present world, and it's going to be that way for quite a while at the rate we're going. I don't give a damn what the French do, and how they fight for the purity of the French language, the French language is going to pick up English, the way the English language picked up French. They might as well lay back and enjoy it as they see the words "computer," and "chips" going into the French language.

Language is a living instrument, and words are power, and the same word means different things to different people in different eras. You have a very simple word like "Theodore." That's "gift of God" in Greek, but "Theopholis" literally translates "friend of God." At the time it was created, it meant "love of God." So the same sounding words a thousand years later mean something different entirely, so you have to be very careful with your words. The Greek speaking people here in the States picked up many English words and incorporated them right into their Greek and rattle it off as if it was Greek. The same way I hear Japanese today rattling off Japanese and you can pick up the English words they are using. I'm sure the young Japanese boys in school think that it's Japanese they are speaking, and when they hear the Americans using the word they think, "Ah, using Japanese words."

Well, we covered a lot of subjects again. We didn't do much on the Hill.

**RITCHIE:** That's okay. I think we can cut it off at this stage today, but I would like to come

back and follow up more on the Congress, and look at some of your photographs, and talk about some of the individuals who you have photographed.

**TAMES:** Sure. I'm fixing up the third floor where we'll have a lot more room. I'll put the pictures and that way we can go over them. Like you triggered me on Bridges here. I hadn't thought about him. I remember that big tie he was wearing, I was very taken by that.

**RITCHIE:** Well, photographs are wonderful for triggering memories, and yours in particular because photography was your life, or your career at least.

**TAMES:** My career and life.

End Interview #3