

SKIRTING POLITICS

Texan Fills Tall Order

By MARIAN McBRIDE

ELIZABETH CARPENTER, a long time girl Friday for Lyndon B. Johnson and his wife, was one of the busiest women in Washington last weekend. Mentioned variously as special assistant and close friend, the former Texas newspaperwoman accompanied Mrs. Johnson Saturday morning when she left her home in northwest Washington to make her pilgrimage to the White House. They then joined President Johnson at the executive office building where he was working.

By Sunday, Mrs. Carpenter's headquarters, which had been in the Johnsons' palatial home, "The Elms," had been moved into the White House.

Mrs. Carpenter—known to everyone in Washington and the Democratic party as "Liz"—masterminds many of the plans and activities for the Johnsons. Although she was attached to the vice-president's staff, her duties often involved Mrs. Johnson's schedule. When "Lady Bird" accompanied the vice-president here last May it was Mrs. Carpenter who suggested the type of event Mrs. Johnson would want planned and executed the details via long distance.

"Sometimes I feel like a two way stretch," Mrs. Carpenter has been quoted as saying. She was explaining the conflict of her duties in working with both Johnsons.

"And you know who wins," she added. "He comes first."

Although she has known the Johnsons for more than 20 years, her stint on their staff began when she took a sabbatical from the Washington news bureau which she and her husband operate to work with Mrs. Johnson and the Kennedy sisters during the "flying teas" in the 1960 campaign. She never left.



MRS. CARPENTER

—Sentinel Photo by Fred L. Tonne

With her quixotic but highly organized mind, Liz is the valuable right hand most people in public office prize. Her abilities range from researching a speech for the then vice-president to handling the press covering a political event or arranging a dinner party for a head of state.

With Liz on the job nothing is left to chance. Weeks of careful preparation are checked and rechecked at the last moment. Her sense of humor continues even during the stress of a program gone inadvertently wrong, but she has no patience for inefficient people.

When one of the women officials of the Democratic party lagged behind to chat last May, Liz snapped: "You're enough of a politician to know we have to be on time. You can't keep thousands of people waiting."

"It's a great challenge," she explained at the time. "I do whatever I'm called on to do. The vice-president expects the most of you but he never asks you to walk farther or work harder than he does tenfold."

Much of her time in the last three years has been spent flying around the country and to all parts of the world. One of her most prized possessions is a gold charm bracelet, laden with mementos of a myriad of places. Lady Bird has contributed most of the collection, including her own special "lady bird" pendant, which she awards to Democratic women throughout the country for outstanding service.

The Carpenters have been friends of the Johnsons for more than a quarter of a century. The new president and his wife attended Liz's wedding 20 years ago to Les Carpenter, who is a correspondent for several Texas newspapers.

Born in Austin, Liz has the same drawl as her two bosses. She describes as a "special thrill" the years of watching and covering for the Texas press Lyndon Johnson's political career in the capital.

Her private life is kept serene by a "wonderful" housekeeper and an understanding husband, who manage her home and assist with the couple's two teen aged children, Scott and Christy.

Now on the other side of the story, the former newspaperwoman and past president of the National Women's Press club claims she will be a different kind of reporter when she returns to her profession. She said her understanding of the demands on public officials has tempered her judgment of what is important.

Having cut her political teeth on the technicalities of campaigning, Mrs. Carpenter grew fast in the grueling position of assistant to the vice-president. But as she moves into the White House as "second" and confidant of the first lady of the land her empathy for the pressures of public life will multiply quickly.