

White House Interview Program

DATE: October 26, 1999

INTERVIEWEE: MARGITA WHITE

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: It's on-the-record, except where you want to go on-background, or off-the-record. That's fine as well.

MW: I don't have any secrets.

MK: Ultimately, this stuff will go into a Presidential Library. So it can go into the library of your choice.

MW: Most of my papers from the [Gerald] Ford, all my papers from the Ford years, are in the Library. And I don't know what's in—there's some stuff in the [Richard] Nixon Library, because I go back all the way to 1959, to the Vice President's papers. Not very important papers, but I was there.

MK: Let's start at the beginning, where you began in your service.

MW: Well, I went to the University of Redlands. I was majoring in economics at the time. In my junior year I came to Washington to participate in the Washington semester program at American University. I ran out of money because I was doing scholarships and working and ended up filing correspondence in the basement of the now Old Russell Office Building for Senator [William] Knowland, who was the minority leader from California. I got Potomac fever and I went back to Redlands and—I tell this to kids, particularly in speeches—I determined to make public service my career. Six years later I had worked for seven elected officials who managed to lose eight elections between them. True story. And Richard Nixon was two of those. But I did change my major to Political Science and I got my MA from Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers. Between college and graduate school I came back to Washington and ended up working in Vice President Nixon's office for Herb Klein, who later became the Director of Communications. So there is a path here.

MK: That's right. I can see it.

MW: Then I went to Rutgers, got my MA, came back and worked in the 1960 campaign. I worked for a congressman briefly after that, and then I went to Hawaii to marry my [former] husband, who was then in the Navy. I lived there for two years and I became involved in a Senate campaign and then working for the Republican members of the House of Representatives out there. Then we came back to Washington where my [former] husband was going to law school at Georgetown and I ended up working as a research assistant for Barry Goldwater and then worked through that campaign. See, the numbers do add up.

Then after that I worked for a research association, had my first child, and then when Richard Nixon began campaigning for President, Herb Klein asked me to do some part-time work for him. So I put together a campaign research book for the 1968 campaign, and ended up working full-time in New York for the campaign. We moved up there with a

White House Interview Program, Interview with Margita White, Martha Joynt Kumar, Washington, D.C., October 26, 1999. Margita White served as the Director of Communications in the administration of President Ford.

baby-sitter and my one-and-a-half-year-old. My [former] husband was doing advance work. So after the election Herb asked me to come to work for him. He became the first Director of Communications. I worked for him for those four years of the first Administration and then I was invited by Jim Keogh, who was then head of USIA [United States Information Agency], to come over there and was Assistant Director for Public Affairs.

Then, when President Ford came in, I was asked to go back to the White House as Assistant Press Secretary assigned to the Communications Office working with Jerry Warren, who was then briefly heading that office, with the understanding that Jerry would only stay about six months, and then I would take over. But, of course, the role of the Communications Office underwent considerable changes over that period, and has ever since, although I'm not quite sure I know what it's doing these days.

MK: It's an office that hasn't had a shape; it's had so many different things.

MW: It was a natural outgrowth of—have you spoken to Herb Klein or has anyone spoken to him yet?

MK: I have not. I have spoken with Jerry Warren.

MW: Okay. In a way, he was more familiar with how that change came about after Watergate but, when the office was first established, it was a natural outgrowth of the structure of the 1968 Presidential campaign and Herb Klein's relationship with both the President and with the national media. He came in as an editor and, rather than being involved in the day-to-day care and feeding of the press covering the President, he had an opportunity to communicate with the larger issues with a larger group of representatives of the media, both print and journalism, throughout the country. That was not always a very good relationship, with two offices trying to define their positions and that of the individuals involved, but it worked pretty well, I thought. It became a permanent institution, really, although the individuals who headed it had different roles along the way.

MK: What did Nixon have to say about the creation of the office and the role of planning in Communications? Do you remember him talking about it?

MW: No. Not off the top of my head. Herb Klein has written a book which you may have access to, which may deal with some of that.

When I came in to the campaign in 1968, my background was a lot in research, although dealing also with media. I had worked very closely with some of the Freedom of Information people—I think I wrote a paper on it; I can't remember precisely how that came about. But I was the one who drafted the statement by President Nixon that, "Truth will be the hallmark of the Nixon Administration."

MK: Right.

MW: That was the commitment during the campaign, during the credibility gap that grew out of the [Lyndon B.] Johnson Administration, and the Vietnam War and so on.

MK: Did he say anything about it?

MW: He approved the statement. That was separate from your question, really. This is going to happen, I think, as we talk; these memories are going to come popping back at me after twenty-five or thirty years.

I don't know precisely. There were so many clips. And I had a lot of them, but I think over the years, I've turned a lot of them over to students who were doing papers and such. So, many of my friends working in the different Administrations have libraries where they kept all their stuff, and I've just never felt that strongly about it. I've been happy to share whatever I have. Whatever I did have is pretty much [dispersed].

MK: I was wondering to what extent Nixon was shaped by the experience under [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, of having watched [James] Hagerty.

MW: Well, Jim Hagerty and Herb Klein were very close friends. In fact, Jim used to come over to the White House quite a bit in those early years. Jerry Friedheim—does that name appear anywhere?

MK: No.

MW: He was at public affairs at the Defense Department. He actually wrote a book, which I don't think was ever published, about the history of the Press Office, which talked a little bit about, as I remember vaguely, how even in the Eisenhower Administration, that Jim Hagerty did see a need for—I'm very vague on this—something beyond the daily care and feeding of the press, to larger thinking, in effect.

MK: He did. In a sense, he combined both things.

MW: Right. I seem to recall—again, I'm so hazy on this because I haven't thought about it for so long—that he was very much a proponent of doing this dual structure.

MK: I can see where he would. The function he performed is just fairly impossible to—

MW: Those were easier days. There was a great deal of press skepticism about the word "director" as part of Communications Director because to the media—I may still have those clips if they would be of any value to you—

MK: They would.

MW: —there was a certain connotation there of directing the press and directing news. That created a lot of paranoia in some of them. But I think the way Herb performed that function, I think that skepticism and concern was dispelled, because he was as straight arrow as anyone and everybody trusted him. People had the highest respect for him, as did I.

MK: Why did he not become Press Secretary?

MW: You'd have to ask him that. I don't remember why the structure worked as it did, but during the campaign Ron [Ziegler] was a spokesman as well, and Herb was doing the larger media relations. So it was sort of an outgrowth from that. But I think he deals with a lot of that in his book, which I haven't read for twenty-five years. That would be a good place to look. I've had so many incarnations since then.

MK: What did your work involve there?

MW: In the first administration, Herb Klein had four assistants: Paul Costello—

MK: And what did each do?

MW: Well, Paul was the senior one. He was a newspaperman coming out of Boston. For one thing, we divided up the Cabinet agencies among ourselves, in terms of keeping in touch with the public affairs people. They would report in to us if there were any major announcements forthcoming. This was part of the function that office served both under Herb and under everybody going through as far as my time went. That was—I guess the word coordinate works—just to sort of keep in touch with the Cabinet departments in terms of major news coming out and what the White House might do to help or what-have-you. So he was dealing with the Defense Department and State, as I recall. I had Justice and Treasury, and Ginger Savell had HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] and I don't remember what else. There was another fellow who joined us, Al Snyder, who also dealt with the TV—he's still around town—and radio contacts for the most part. I was more of a jack-of-all-trades because I oversaw all the correspondence that came and went, to coordinate who got assigned what, correspondence to deal with or to respond to—. Of course, the office changed as Jeb Magruder and others came in—but in terms of assigning a lot of the tasks to members of the staff. And then, as the White House did, we had our own assignment forms. I would fill in the forms and assign what they should do with them and I kept a copy. We had due dates; and it was very much a part of the Nixon White House way of doing business.

MK: Would the way of dealing and coordinating come from on high, like the Chief of Staff's office laid out procedures that all of the offices follow?

MW: There were a lot of procedures but—no. We created our own, but there was the overall action memo that came down from the Chief of Staff to Herb and to everybody else at the next levels. Those we dealt with. But we did our own because we got a lot of—for example, if there was a major announcement to be forthcoming by the President—then one of us would put together an action plan as to what should we mail to editors and publishers, people around the country; should we have a briefing over here at the Old EOB [Executive Office Building] for the press that covers these kind of health issues?—or whatever the topic was. So there was that kind of coordination internally within the Office, which went beyond the day of the announcement and the press secretary just saying that today we're announcing this. We were more into depth and more in to going beyond the Beltway press to around the country.

MK: Say if you had a health announcement, some kind of health proposal, would you be dealing with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as well as dealing with the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Rocky Mountain News*?

MW: We were more likely to deal with all of them, but we would be dealing with editors or specialty writers, as opposed to the White House press corps. So we reached the media at several different levels this way.

I can't really speak for everybody but my concern was always trying to get beyond the headlines to provide some depth of understanding to what the news was all about, which also was helpful to the editorial writers and the columnists and what have you.

MK: I see. How did you judge whether you had been successful?

- MW: They probably do that a lot more now than we ever did then. We didn't have focus groups or anything else. I don't know that we ever—certainly you would judge whether there was a measure that needed to be passed by Congress as to whether you were successful. But I don't know that we ever had a system of retrospection. When you're in the White House, you never have time to stop and breathe; you just keep going. Although I did watch one episode of the "West Wing"—
- MK: I haven't watched it yet.
- MW: It was so foreign to me. I gather it was still foreign to people who are there today, because it felt like a press room, people were going and it was all frantic. But it's not like that; it's more understated pressure; it's more quiet. You can feel the tension because there's so much going on, but it's not noisy—which is what that series suggested. I was just tense after watching it.
- MK: Did you have a system of getting clips from editorials?
- MW: We had a clipping service.
- MK: You do the News Summary.
- MW: In those days it was very—you didn't have computers; you didn't have instant access. So you got these clips with little tags on them of where they came from—weeks afterwards sometimes. It was not a very scientific collection of information, but we tried to get sort of feedback. I know I put together books. When I traveled with President Ford and we met with the regional press, I tried to collect the follow-up clips—as far as we got them—in the books that covered the trips that we made. It certainly was very sparse out of the total, I'm sure.
- MK: I've gone back into the papers of George Cortelyou, who was a secretary to [William] McKinley. He started with [Grover] Cleveland and then worked for McKinley and for Theodore Roosevelt. The system during McKinley's administration was the same. They had a little printed thing that they would glue to the top of the articles that were clipped out that would have the date on it and the name of—
- MW: That's the way the clipping services did it, I think, for years.
- MK: So it's interesting to see. I think White Houses have been dogged by that forever.
- MW: That was true also of working on the Hill and elsewhere. Politicians beyond the executive branch, cabinet departments, also subscribed to clipping services, because you really didn't have access to the media the way we do today.
- MK: And on the Hill, they have so many interns that interns are always clippers.
- MW: I was an intern before there was a name intern, those summer jobs I had. I was a receptionist but nobody called me an intern. I was a gopher.
- MK: What other kinds of things did you do in the office?
- MW: Back to the Nixon times now?

MK: Back to the Nixon times, yes.

MW: I'm so vague.

MK: Let's go back to the health story. If you were going to release information about a health story and you wanted to build information so that people were knowledgeable, would you take a strategy of choosing one newspaper and providing an exclusive to that one newspaper like the *Times* or the *Post*?

MW: Not very often. I think maybe—I didn't work on health stories because I was more in Treasury and Justice but I don't recall—. Well, maybe. If one major publication had a greater reputation for knowledge and depth and positive response to a certain issue, then you might certainly arrange for in-depth interviews with the expert for those people. I can't recall a specific example, but that certainly would be consistent with the purpose of the reach-out effort.

MK: In Treasury and Justice, if a reporter wanted to talk to the secretary or attorney general—.

MW: They wouldn't call us to talk to the secretary.

MK: They wouldn't?

MW: No, with the possible exception of Sam Donaldson. Sam Donaldson covered Justice at the time—one of those two. Once he found me at the White House he was the most dogged reporter. He would call and try to finagle from me what I knew was coming out of the department. To this day I run into him and he remembers me; it's pretty amazing. For the most part, the reporters who covered the respective agencies would not be calling the White House. He was an exception to the rule. And still is an exception, I think.

MK: I think so. Did your office book people on television, as guests?

MW: In fact, I was for a while there the person that [coordinated that]—"Issues and Answers" was then the ABC program. "Meet the Press" would call to see if I could help get so-and-so, but it also worked the other way. This would be a good weekend, because we knew when an announcement was coming out of, say HEW, since we're still on the health thing; it would be a good time for Bob Finch or whoever it was to be a guest on one of the weekend shows. So we would pass that along and say we could help make him available and there would be good reason to do this, or something like that. It was a very loose coordination; we certainly didn't control what went on the shows. But it was to the mutual benefit of both the show to have something timely and to the administration to put forward the person who could best talk about the issue of the moment. It was a coordinating effort and it worked pretty well. I don't know how that is done now, but I assume there is still that kind of contact—but much more intense than anything we ever did.

MK: That's right. I think that they want certain people on, and probably other people not on.

MW: Right. That's human nature. But I always tried to look at everything we did in the positive light of education, as opposed to pr [public relations] in its negative sense. People used to make fun of me for being such an idealist in all this, but I really believed in what I was doing.

MK: Did you find that the Sunday programs were a good way of setting the table for the week, that you would have a certain message that went out there and then the Monday papers reflected it?

MW: Yes. As I recall, Monday was generally a slower news day, anyway, so what came out of those Sunday shows had a lot to do with it. The “theme of the week” or whatever it would be. Again, I’m not sure what I’m saying in retrospect is something I remember from then or something that I have absorbed since. One has to very careful.

MK: Today it’s very much the case.

MW: I think we were sensitive to that, but it was not such a media-saturated environment as we have today. We only had the three networks, essentially, and a couple of newspapers on the eastern seaboard that mostly set the pace for the rest of the nation. We didn’t have CNN; we didn’t have a lot of things.

MK: And it wasn’t quite as fast—

MW: No.

MK: —as fast a cycle where you had to come in—

MW: Right. We would do mailings in both administrations of the briefings, for example, following the announcement of a major initiative. We would mail them by slow boat so you wouldn’t get it to the editorial offices for a week or so; then maybe they sat on it; and it would be three weeks before they really focused on some of these issues. I think in a way that was a lot better than today, where everything has to be instant.

MK: How did you set up the list of newspapers and groups that you sent materials to? You had an extensive list.

MW: We had an extensive mailing list and, I think, it essentially was the larger newspapers by a certain circulation. It was nothing very scientific in terms of focusing on a region of the country, even. I think it was just: send it to the largest newspapers, and the medium-sized newspapers. We also had a good relationship—I did at least—with what was then called the National Newspaper Association, which represented smaller dailies and weeklies. I remember working closely with that association, which I think has since been absorbed by the larger association. For television and radio, it was strictly out of *Broadcasting* [magazine’s] yearbook. You picked out stations that way.

MK: You also had lists of ethnic press.

MW: Right. We did. But it was whatever we could find out was out there. To that extent, I remember we tried to focus on who this message—I remember dealing with an Hispanic editor in Florida, for example, who used to call me and I used to brief him on what I knew. Lo and behold, years later, he wrote an editorial supporting my appointment to the FCC [Federal Communications Commission]. It’s funny I remember that, because I hadn’t seen him for some time. In Spanish.

MK: Did you work together at all with what would be political affairs?

MW: Well, what do they call it? The office that Bill Baroody...?

MK: Public Liaison.

MW: Public Liaison. Not as much as one might imagine. But we did work with them. Elizabeth Dole headed that at one point, later. The one I remember was Bill Baroody, Jr., when he headed that office. I think that was in the Ford administration.

MK: It was created in August.

MW: [Inaudible]. It really does. One of the things I found particularly helpful—I dug out these articles. I don't know why I have them here—this morning [to get ready for this interview] was I ran into this. This was in *Editor and Publisher*, when I was appointed to go back to the White House under Ford. But for some reason, I summarized the job under these various points, which I didn't even have time to look at real closely. That's historic record.

MK: "New Title and Less Pay" [caption of article]. That's interesting. Of course, when DeeDee Myers came in, she had less pay, too.

MW: [Inaudible]. This is the *Broadcasting* magazine [article]. They only do one profile in your lifetime. They did it then rather than when I went to the FCC. I just dragged these out; you can take those with you. But I was interested to run into the way I described the points of what the Communications office did. I thought you might find that helpful.

MK: Did Nixon ever meet—well, Ford did meet with the Sperling Group. Did you arrange that?

MW: No. Herb would have. Ford?

MK: Yes. Ford met with them. They came to the White House. I remember Peter Lisagor was somewhat upset about it. He—

MW: Good old Peter Lisagor. Bob Pierpoint told me this is what's going to happen to you, because he [Lisagor] died to cancer. That's why I have the asthma, because I smoked, too. He was a great guy.

MK: He was.

MW: He really was. How did you get into this? You're asking me all these—

MK: I worked on a book that covered the Ford time period so I spent a lot of time there.

MW: After the fact, though. You were doing it at the time?

MK: I was doing it at the time.

MW: You probably remember more than I do.

MK: No.

MW: I did not arrange that. I had contacts with Godfrey Sperling, in arranging people to go there, but I don't remember—it could be. I do remember helping him arrange Cabinet members and others to meet with him. Of course, when I worked with Jim Keogh [Director of USIA], I went with Jim Keogh to that breakfast and I was never forgiven for coming along. Keogh wanted me to, and so I went because usually only the principal would be in on it.

MK: What was it like?

MW: It was a very clubby atmosphere over at the Carlton and that F Street—no the F Street Club but you know—

MK: I know what it is.

MW: —that little separate room. The very in-group.

MK: How many people were there, and how many were men?

MW: They were all men, I think. It's so long ago. The names you would think of, but I don't remember any women in there. Maybe Helen [Thomas], but I don't remember.

MK: It tended to have all the heavy hitters, except for nobody could come from the *Globe*.

MW: Really?

MK: Yes, because he was *Christian Science Monitor*, and it was Boston-based.

MW: Of course.

MK: So the *Globe* would not be invited. Did you have a regular schedule for bringing people in from out of town, editors coming in from out of town?

MW: I don't think that it was as regular as that, but we certainly did it—I remember doing it quite a bit under Ford. I'm more hazy about under Nixon because I wasn't involved in everything at that point. We did on a regular basis—not once a month but periodically, I remember in the Ford administration, inviting print and broadcast media in for briefings. I used Alan Greenspan a lot. We had what we used to call the “Herb Klein Memorial Room” which was that fourth floor in the Executive Office Building briefing room.

MK: The big one, 450?

MW: Yes. That was built under Herb's direction.

MK: Was it built then?

MW: Yes.

MK: It had about 200 seats?

MW: Yes.

MK: It's now been gussied up and it's been renamed.

MW: Well, it was never named “Herb Klein,” but that's [what] we referred to it as.

MK: It used to just be 450; everybody talked about 450. I think it was during the end of 1998 they spiffed it up and it's now called Presidential Hall.

MW: Oh my. I can't stand it. It's like everything over there has such history. I first went over to the White House summer of 1958 when Bob Pierpoint, who preceded me at the University of the Redlands, was CBS correspondent. He took me over there and introduced me to a nice young woman who was one of the secretaries to Jim Hagerty. Her name was Carlene [Bonnivier; later Conrad]; she was only eighteen, from California, a young Hispanic girl. She and I became fast friends. The next year when I came back, we arranged to live together that summer, before I went to Eagleton. So she was working for Jim Hagerty, and I was working for Herb Klein. I'd stop by the White House quite a bit—I hadn't been back now for a while—and there was this area where you walked into the West Wing where the press hung out and they were playing poker over in this area. I still have visions of that setting.

MK: Describe when you go in, in that door where now the Marine stands, when you went straight in.

MW: When you went straight in, there was a big round table. I remember that. Then, of course, the Press office was on the left; the reporters just hung out. Then on the right-hand side, they were playing poker that day, that one day I remember.

MK: Was it all open? Was it an open area?

MW: Yes. I'm trying to visualize it. I have, by the way—and I don't think it's here—my in-laws kept the *Life* magazine, all the issues from the first year, 1937. I found in one of those issues the floor plan of the White House under Roosevelt, and who was where. They called them the little wigs and the big wigs. It was sort of a fascinating thing. I ran into it right after Clinton came into office and sent a little note with it to George Stephanopoulos, who obviously didn't see it, because I got a thank-you note for my support. I thought you would get a kick out of it. Anyway, that's backtracking.

MK: If you have a copy of that, that would be—

MW: I ran into it not long ago but where the heck would it be?

MK: I just haven't seen any pictures. The ramp that goes from the Lower Press to the Upper Press they have the Norman Rockwell drawings that have the table. That was a wonderful old table. They have the couches and whatnot but what you don't see is you don't have a sense of what the area looked like because, for me, the area just dates from the lobby, knowing it from the lobby, because I was not there before the Press Room was built. So I haven't seen any pictures.

MW: All that building took place in the Nixon administration, when they filled in the pool and all that.

MK: I think Johnson tried to do a little bit, adding some stuff here and there, but the big work was done then. When that was done, do you remember the discussions of why it should be done, why the area should be moved over?

MW: I don't remember discussions. I remember there was need for more space. I remember reading about various sinister reasons, or whatever it was, but I don't remember any discussion to that effect.

MK: The degree to which there was an awareness, by doing that, you would move them away from the guests—when people come out they're obviously going to get tackled by reporters.

MW: It's not a bad idea, now that I think about it.

MK: Everybody has always wanted to move them far away, but there's a feeling that can't be done.

In the preparations for the press conferences, what kinds of work did you do on that? How was the president prepared, for both Nixon and Ford?

MW: Well, I think both times, the staffs from all the offices would come out with questions from their areas of expertise, that they might expect would come up, and what the answers would be. I think from our office it would be more in terms of what we thought were the newsworthy questions. But I really don't remember that much. There was a book put together, a briefing book.

MK: Was that book just maintained regularly?

MW: I don't remember. I didn't maintain it, so I don't know.

MK: Did you do rehearsals?

MW: Not that I recall, but I wouldn't have been involved in that. That would have been more like the Ron Ziegler, the Ron Nessen-kind-of-involvement if there was, I think. Richard Nixon was more apt to sit back and think through these things himself. I have a hard time visualizing him practicing. And Jerry Ford just seemed so comfortable with himself that I can't really visualize that, either. I used to sit in on most of his briefings in the Oval Office or elsewhere. Although I would provide background information on the people and on the issues and so on, he was always so comfortable in his own skin, in terms of talking about positions. How he ever screwed up that Poland thing is beyond me.

MK: Well, I guess probably just thinking of international ripples.

MW: Yes.

MK: Presidents seem to always worry—the one thing they worry about in those kinds of settings is making an official error that becomes very difficult to clean up from. So you always want to act on the conservative side.

Do you remember and did you have anything to do with the briefing that Ford did at the State Department that dealt with the budget? He did it in January of 1976. It was White House correspondents and financial correspondents. It had all the members of the Cabinet save one; I think [Henry] Kissinger wasn't there. Everybody else was there.

MW: I should remember it.

MK: He went for, I would say, two hours, something close to two hours.

MW: I remember a couple of events over there in the auditorium.

MK: And he took all the questions. Although he had all the Cabinet people there, he did every one of them himself.

MW: I should remember. I'm sure I was there; I just don't remember.

MK: It was a spectacular performance.

MW: That's what my recollection was of him.

MK: I wondered just what kind of briefings were set up for that.

MW: I think those would have been more with the substantive people, and the press people probably weren't that much involved.

MK: Let's see. During—

MW: Again, I have to warn you: a lot of the things you hear me say [are] what I think because I don't remember that much in detail. It's sort of an era coming back to me here.

MK: What was a White House day like? Compare it under both Nixon and Ford.

MW: Well, the big difference was, I came in later in the morning under Nixon.

MK: Really?

MW: Under Ford, I was a part of the Press Office pre-senior-staff-meeting meeting. I was in the senior staff meeting. So I was there at six-thirty at the latest every morning. In the Nixon [Administration] I didn't have to worry about that so much. I used to come in at nine o'clock. I had one child when I started in the Nixon administration. I had my second child—as Herb Klein said, “Thank God, it's not an election year”—in 1971 when I was at the White House. I can't remember so much about the typical day in the Nixon White House. In the Ford White House it did start out with a meeting in Ron's office and I would go to the senior staff meeting. Then I would go back and regroup as to what was coming up. I would go back and meet with my staff and sort of highlight what needed to be highlighted for them. Interestingly, I took notes because I had to keep track of all this stuff. My handwriting was legible in those days. I turned over my senior staff meeting notes to the Ford Library a few years ago and it's one of the few written materials they have from those senior staff meetings. It's not in any depth; it's more like what was discussed. And when the President was there, which he was every other week, once a week, or so—I can't remember—I would quote what he would say sometimes. You might find something of value there. Then I'd go back and work on whatever—the phone never stopped ringing. That was the other thing. You were reacting as much as—

MK: How many calls would you handle a day, say in both administrations?

MW: It was constant. My secretary kept a log. I think I threw all that stuff out. It's a terrible thing to say. I think they may be in the Ford Library, actually. I kept a log in the Ford administration; I did not in the Nixon administration. And Herb Klein got thousands of calls, because everybody knew him. Of course, I had to deal with “Mrs. White calling from the White House”—that was always cute. People thought this is a put-on, right? I probably got a hundred a day.

MK: How do you deal with that many calls?

MW: Well, I didn't take them all. I returned a lot of them, and some I referred elsewhere. That may be a little much. Seventy-five maybe. But it was more calls than I could deal with.

MK: In the senior staff meetings in the Ford administration—you didn't go to any in the Nixon administration, right?

MW: No.

MK: In the Ford administration, how would they begin?

MW: I wish I had my notes.

MK: Did they go around the table?

MW: I don't think so. Who was Chief of Staff? [Donald] Rumsfeld?

MK: Rumsfeld, and then [Richard] Cheney.

MW: They would normally run the meeting and then, if the President was there, of course, that would change things.

MK: What was the difference in having the President in?

MW: Everybody sort of shaped up. I don't recall really. I was always so awed by the whole thing; I never stopped being awed. It was really a neat feeling, being in that room. I have such a tremendous respect for most of the people I got to know who worked for President Ford, but most of all for President Ford. He was so right for the country at that time; it was such a shame that he wasn't re-elected. But you have to remember that I went back to 1959 working for Richard Nixon, and it was tough on a lot of us, what happened. And Ford sort of helped restore a lot of the—what's the word I'm looking for—respect and the aura of the White House for me and the presidency.

MK: And I guess for the country as well.

MW: Absolutely. But one thing I should mention here is, the Office of Communications changed dramatically from what it was under Herb, what it became as Chuck Colson moved in with his input, and Jeb Magruder moved into the Office, and then when Ken Clawson took over, and then when Watergate came about. When I came back [from USIA] working under Jerry—if you'd spoken to Jerry you'd know this—it was much reduced in visibility, scope of operation, than it had been in the interim. I wanted it to be that way. In fact, we didn't even use the Office of Communications [title] much in those days and certainly "Director of Communications" was not, I think, a title that Jerry even used when he came in. When Jerry left—and I recommended it; it was such a thing—I recommended that we at least should use the word communications as part nuance of the title. But, instead of being Director of Communications, I wanted my title to be Director of the Office of Communications, because I wanted to get away from that aura that came out under the Clawson operation, that we directed communications, and I wanted to be more facilitative.

MK: Can you go back and look at the differences in the operation, how it worked, under those various people?

MW: Well, the difference, of course, was that Herb came in to that with much more experience and maturity and news judgment and media life than I did coming in to it. [Inaudible.] I didn't come out of the journalism profession. So I was not considered a peer by the journalism profession, as Herb was. So that really made a difference in terms of my

relationship with a lot of the media. Also, in the Ford administration, I literally was under Ron Nessen, which was not the case—Herb and Ron Ziegler were separate entities. I was very happy with that, because I really wanted to restore the credibility of that office, and do the kinds of things that I thought were important in terms of the media reach-out and the in-depth briefings and working with the departments and agencies without resorting to—I'm getting a little fuzzy here—getting away from the coffee with Clawson or whatever it was.

MK: It was cocktails with Clawson.

MW: Okay. Getting away from that hard image that was a remnant of Watergate. But, again, this was twenty-five years ago.

MK: What was the office like when Colson and Magruder were there?

MW: Well, when Magruder came in, he seemed like a nice young man. And he was nice. By the way, have you been over to see Fred Maroon's photo exhibit at the Smithsonian?

MK: No.

MW: It's really fascinating. I helped Fred identify some of the people in there. He lives down the street from me. It's kind of interesting, some of the pictures there. Where was I?

MK: Looking at the time under Magruder and Colson as well.

MW: I think there's a psychological reason why I don't want to think back to those times.

MK: You don't want to go there.

MW: I don't want to go there. Well, Jeb brought in under him, I assume with [H. R.] Haldeman's involvement, several young people who reported to him and then reported also to Haldeman. The operation became—I don't know how I would describe it. There was sort of an imposed efficiency, but I'm not sure it accomplished as much as it might have, because that's when the real action memos came about internally. I sort of kept track of them. But you had to have a plan for everything. It's coming back to me now. And sometimes I got very frustrated because the plans looked good on paper but it was more as if they were written—I've got to be very careful—to look good to those that had to approve them as opposed to being practical in terms of accomplishing the results that we sought to achieve. I think that's probably as far as I should go on this.

MK: Can you give me an example?

MW: No, I really can't.

MK: Did you find, in looking at the communications operation over the years you were there—you were there for a couple of elections—

MW: Where is this material going? You told me at the beginning.

MK: There are several different places. Ultimately, it goes in to the presidential library.

MW: Right.

MK: Then it is going to be used for the new people coming in, in 2001, coming in to the various offices.

MW: I remember that now.

MK: It's building an institutional memory. There are seven offices and the Communications Office is one of them. I'm writing the piece on Communications because this has been sort of an area for me. I guess my take on it, the way I've begun my piece, is to talk about the way in which the office is very different than the Press [Office]—which has had a clear constituency and a clear function. There's been a continuity in that office, whereas in Communications it has had a lot of different lives—

MW: It certainly has.

MK: —including within administrations.

MW: Even within just those eight years.

MK: Part of it, I wonder if it relates to a campaign, that, during an election campaign because that office has been involved in long-range planning, that it becomes an office that is very involved in a re-election campaign?

MW: Well, in the Nixon administration, I left out an important person who joined the staff later, Devan Shumway, who is still a good friend of mine, who came in after Paul Costello left. He came in from UPI [United Press International] in California. I do remember now that going into that election year—because in the 1968 election I had coordinated all the requests from media and elsewhere for statements by the presidential candidate on the issues; every newspaper wants to run side-by-side what the views of the candidates are. I had done that in the 1968 campaign; that was almost my full-time job. Going into 1972, Van Shumway and I were asked to put together sort of a blueprint for what the media offices needed to deal with in the presidential campaign. Remember, this was going into my fourth presidential campaign at that point. So he and I put together a sort of an outline of what had to be built up, not just in the White House, but in terms of what should be elsewhere. It turned out to be CREEP [Committee to Re-Elect the President]. What could be done within the White House that would be appropriate and what should be done elsewhere?

What brings back the memory is that, one of the biggest frustrations I had during the 1972 campaign was, I was coordinating again within the office, “What the President's position was on these issues,” and I was forever running into differences of opinion with Ann Dore McLaughlin, who was then over at the committee, as to what took priority. It wasn't important; it was just very frustrating. It didn't really affect our operation as much, the Communications operation that much, as I think it just affected the atmosphere. I think this is what you were referring to.

MK: You can do a lot of long-range planning when you have an election coming that's going to be [inaudible] for a White House.

MW: I was relieved when the FCC opening came up. I was exhausted going into the 1976 campaign. It's funny how this came out. It was April, I think. I had been traveling all over the country on Air Force One or the press plane—a six-state trip where I had arranged several regional briefings and other events for the President. I got home at three-thirty or four in the morning, went to bed, got up at six, knocked [over] a full pot of coffee on my

lap, and ended up in the [hospital] emergency room with second-degree burns all the way down my leg. As they peeled off the skin in the emergency room, Dick Wiley, who was then Chairman of the FCC [Federal Communications Commission], tried to reach me to let me know that he had just been to the White House Personnel Office to urge I be appointed to an impending FCC vacancy he had just learned about that morning. When I got his surprising message as I came to, I thought this was something I wanted to do. Timing was everything. I'd drafted the proposal for the expanded Communications Office role in the campaign, but at that moment I knew I didn't have the strength to follow through.

Dave Gergen and I were like this; we worked so close together. When they decided that Dave would move in there, I was just tickled pink. It was just the best outcome for me. It's funny how those things happen.

I can't imagine anything being more intense over a period of time than working in the White House.

MK: What are the pressures of it?

MW: Well, you're always under a microscope, but that's true in political positions elsewhere as well. I think it's the long days; I would get in there six-thirty or seven and not leave until seven-thirty or eight. There's always pressure.

MK: What kind of pressure is it? Where does it come from?

MW: I think a lot of it with me was self-imposed because there was no way I could do everything I wanted to do. That's sort of a starting point. I think that's true with everyone; there's so much more you could do if you work just a little more, a little stronger, a little healthier, a little wiser. I don't know; it's hard to define. I can't pinpoint what made it so intense. There's always a little bit of backbiting and all that, probably more there than elsewhere, but that's never been a big concern to me.

MK: Is it anymore than in any other kind of place?

MW: I think so. Absolutely.

MK: People have talked about that.

MW: I can't define it, but it's there.

MK: How does it manifest itself?

MW: You sort of lose track of your real life. I had two small children. Fortunately I had live-in help and everything else. It's just: everything else becomes secondary as you're trying to do the best you can—assuming you're trying to do the best you can—in this position. The hardest thing is to achieve a balance. I think I probably had better balance than a lot of people, because I felt I was really doing this because I believed in what I was doing, not that I necessarily loved what I was doing. If they didn't want me there the next day, so be it. I wasn't that sensitive to where my future was going. Remember, I was a woman; and I never knew I was going to have a career in the first place. So it wasn't as if the whole world depended on my supporting them [the family]. As it turned out, it did, but that's another story. For that reason I think I had a better balance than a lot of the men did, certainly.

MK: Did you work on Saturdays?

MW: Yes.

MK: What hours?

MW: Well, in the Ford administration, when things were not quite as intense, I arranged to work every other Saturday. We always had staff on. I still remember bringing in my daughter who was then—Fred Maroon took some pictures of her, I remember—on Saturday. She was probably about six or seven; she knew her letters. So to keep her busy, I had marked a bunch of stuff for filing by circling the first letter of everything. I still remember her sitting on the floor and putting everything into neat little piles. It kept her happy for hours at a time. It was more nine to three or four; it wasn't like the rest of the days of the week. I kind of liked it because it gave me a chance to catch up. It wasn't like today where you could take your computer and do the work at home; you had to be there.

MK: What about Sundays?

MW: Rarely. I don't remember working Sundays.

MK: In both administrations?

MW: Yes. I don't remember Sunday ever—I took work home. I still took a lot of work home; I did a lot of letters at home.

MK: One person talked about the backbiting in terms of just general job insecurity, and the fact that there are people who always wanted your job or wanted you out of your job. In his administration he said there were only three people who were what he called bulletproof. They were three senior aides. He said it was open season on everybody else. It seems to go with the White House; it does [not?] make a difference whether it's Democrats or Republicans.

MW: I think there's a lot of that. Can we turn this off for just a minute, I just want to ask you something?

MK: Sure.

[Interruption]

MK: The time that you were there, can you categorize the different functions that were primarily performed by the Communications Office? It was different under Klein as opposed to—you've talked about it under Jerry, lower profile. What about with Magruder and Clawson, when they were there?

MW: Of course, I left shortly after Clawson came in, because those two years I was over at the USIA, trying to explain this to the rest of the world. I don't have that much of a recollection under Clawson because, as I said, there wasn't that much overlap, I don't think. When Jeb Magruder came in, I was in the corner office facing Pennsylvania and the White House. In fact, I picked out that location for the Office of Communications when Johnson was still President. I went over there to scout out office space and that seemed like a good space; that's how we started out in that space. Here's the corner office. Herb was over here. Here

was the entryway. Paul Costello and I and Ginger, all three, shared that office initially. Then we spread out and I think it was just Paul and I. Then Paul left—how did this happen?

Well, when Jeb Magruder came in, he couldn't stand sharing an office with me, because there was so much he was doing he didn't want anybody to know, I guess. So one day, one weekend, they built a wall between the two of us. They built the wall actually, not between the two of us; they gave me the office to the left, and they divided the office into sort of—literally they divided the office so he got two-thirds and I got one-third.

MK: Without—

MW: I was told about it but I had no say in it. I don't like to share my office, either. But it was such a narrow area that the people who came in to see Jeb thought I was his secretary, and after one week of this I said, "I'm not going to put up with this." So they moved me in to the next office. Then my secretary and his secretary, I guess, were out here. So that worked pretty well. That was my introduction, after about a month or two working with Jeb. It's probably just as well I wasn't listening in to every thing that was going on.

MK: When did you have a sense that the Administration was sort of running off the rails?

MW: Did I have that sense? I'm trying to think. My area of frustration and concern was—I'm trying to remember the timing but it had to have been summer or fall of 1972—when there was a power situation between Herb Klein and Chuck Colson. They were reorganizing the staff functions. Maybe it was in conjunction with the campaign. Colson wanted me to work for him. I went to Herb and said, "No, I'll quit before that." [Inaudible] So I ended up staying with Herb, and working with Jeb, as opposed to working with Chuck Colson.

I don't know if off the rails is the right feeling. There was a lot of—there's nothing new about this—tension between the various players at that time. I was really just a cog in the machinery there, but it was reflected, particularly in that instance. Then came the election; I still remember how exciting that was. Then, in January, I began the job with USIA. So I wasn't there as Watergate unraveled and all of that. In fact, Watergate happened on my birthday, in retrospect. Nobody knew about it. I don't know how I ran into that fact.

MK: It would have been better if they were celebrating your birthday.

MW: In fact, Gordon Liddy, I first met him when he was at Treasury or Justice, one or the other. But there was an administration initiative to intercept drugs coming in through Mexico called Operation Intercept. They were coordinating between Justice and Treasury and the White House. Somehow Gordon Liddy ended up working for one of those two departments—I can't remember which—and he came over to the White House to meet with me about setting up the briefings for Herb and [Richard] Kleindienst and [George] Shultz. I can't remember who was what anymore. They were going to go down and brief the major cities, San Diego and somewhere else. I sat down with Liddy, he told me his plans and we walked through this. I went back to Herb afterwards and said, "This isn't going to work and I'm not going to work with this person." So he was taken off of it and I did it myself.

MK: What kind of things did he want to do?

MW: I don't remember. I just remember this man—I just went back and said, "This man is kind of crazy." I don't want this to be on his radio show. But, no, I remember that specifically.

- The things one remembers compared to what one doesn't. That's probably a minor thing in the total scheme of things, but that struck me afterwards.
- MK: What about Howard Hunt?
- MW: I never met him.
- MK: He was working—I guess he worked with Colson.
- MW: He was there, but I don't even remember seeing him. I just remember his picture. All this unraveled after I was at USIA.
- MK: Watergate within the Washington community was a real thing because the *Washington Post* just had it day after day; the *Times* didn't during that time period. It was only the *Post*. So people in Washington had a sense of it in a way that was not true outside of the country because every day there was another kind of story. What was it like inside the White House? What kind of—?
- MW: I wasn't at the White House.
- MK: Well, during 1972. The Watergate stories in the *Washington Post* started right in the beginning. The *Times* got onto it in January, but before that the *Post* had it.
- MW: All I remember was going in to Herb Klein when this thing broke and I said, "God, if we had anything to do with this, we better fess up quick." I remember saying that, but I don't remember much else after that.
- MK: I guess going back and looking at the different functions that the office has had over time, did speechwriting come underneath it at any point during the time you were there?
- MW: No. The News Summary came under it during the Ford period and I was under Jim Shuman. He really directed that operation; I had very little to do with it until Darlene Schmalzreid sued me [the President] for discrimination against women. This is in the Archives. We were going through a budget review. I had been told that there was a freeze on salaries so nobody—essentially submitted salaries as they were at that point. It would have been the end of 1975, maybe. The next thing I knew—because she did not know that the salaries had gone through me; she had requested a raise. She was all over the newspapers how she sued the President for discrimination against women because she didn't get a raise. They [her lawyers] came to the White House; I was deposed. I think I turned the deposition material over to the Ford Library. Of course, the story never came out that it was a woman that did this, and there was no discrimination; everybody's salary was frozen. But the press had a field day with that. I mean Ford of all people; it was ludicrous. But the press summary, I was not involved that much with it, really. That reported to Jim, and that was a separate function when I came over there and it stayed; but it was for functional reasons it was within the White House, Office of Communications operation.
- MK: But speechwriting was never underneath it?
- MW: No. Bill Safire, of course, was there in the Nixon administration. Jim Keogh, of course, was the head of the speechwriters. No, it was not. I know it has been in other administrations.
- MK: Yes. It's been a really fluid kind of operation.

MW: So much of it I think has to do with the individual that heads the office and what the qualifications and the relationship to the President are.

MK: And to the Chief of Staff.

MW: Precisely.

MK: And what they want out of them. Sometimes it becomes a spot to put somebody because they're sort of a "floater". For example, Stephanopoulos was a "floater" who was involved in the shape of policy, as well as its explanation.

MW: Right. Of course, Dave Gergen was everywhere. I worked very closely with Dave when he was dealing with speechwriting, and all these other issues. In fact, we worked very closely together going back to the 1968 campaign. That's how I got to know Alan Greenspan. It's a long time ago.

MK: What did Gergen do with the office?

MW: You mean after I left? Well, it was going into a campaign year so they built it up with greater staffing and greater involvement after this post-Watergate era, where we'd been sort of low profile in my time, which was fine. It was appropriate.

MK: Did the number of people in that office vary from the time when it started to the time that you were heading it?

MW: I think it was about the same size when I headed [it] as it was when it started. But it had gone up from when it started, and then it went down again.

MK: What were the variations?

MW: I don't know the numbers. I really don't remember numbers. But we started out, there were four professionals and Herb and the secretarial staff.

MK: What about when you headed it?

MW: Well, it was myself and I had a deputy [Randall Woods] and then Jim Shuman; we were smaller. Yes. We were smaller.

MK: What was the ratio with professionals to support staff?

MW: Well, it's hard to define support staff. For example, there was a woman who kept track of clippings and did research and so on; she was a little more than just support. She used to draft some material.

MK: Was that Agnes Waldron?

MW: No. Agnes and I go way back to 1959, when she worked in the vice president's office. Agnes came in after I left. No. Her name was Donna Kingwell [Nixon administration]. Then there was another woman [Ford administration] who dated Alan Greenspan for a while whose name escapes me [Margaret Earl]. There's a lot of history here.

MK: So, was it like one-and-a-half support people if you—

MW: Yes. That sounds about right.

MK: —categorize it for each professional.

MW: I think we were about ten people.

MK: Ten at the beginning?

MW: No. Ten when I was there.

MK: During its high point in numbers, was that leading up to 1972?

MW: Yes.

MK: And how many people would there have been then?

MW: I really don't know. That would be in the records somewhere but—

MK: Those records are very difficult to—

MW: Twenty maybe. I used to have a personnel list from the campaign time. I may still have it.

MK: Do you have any telephone books?

MW: I did. I could look.

MK: Telephone books are particularly useful. What I'll do is, I'm just across the street; I've got a really fantastic xerox machine and I'll bring them back.

MW: I'll look. I have a box in the closet downstairs, of what I have left. But I've been very generous with students who promised to return stuff, and never did.

MK: I will swear—

MW: With you, I wouldn't propose in a professional situation that would—it's my students who probably just threw it out.

MK: It's easy for me to xerox it and just bring it back to you. Well, let me go back to what a White House feels like because people coming in are going to have to have a sense of how you prepare for going in and then how do you know when it's time to leave?

MW: That's a good question; how to prepare for coming in. Well, you're coming in, you're so awestruck that I think in many situations common sense doesn't always prevail. I think that's what happened to some of the younger people in the Nixon administration, the Watergate, including some of the young people that worked with Jeb. They are so excited and so imbued with the power that they seem to forget why they have the power and what it's for. You certainly want to be loyal to your boss and to your leader, but you have to step back and if you have questions, ask yourself why do you have the questions? I'm not suggesting every time you disagree with somebody you should resign, but if there is a pattern that you feel there is something wrong, then you need to think about it and use your

conscience as a guide. I think that's partly what happened. I don't want to go into names, but some of the people that worked with Jeb—and Jeb himself—I think they lost their moral compass and probably never realized they weren't serving the greater good when they were not.

MK: Who sets the compass?

MW: I want to be charitable, because these are people that were in situations that I'm sure in retrospect they would reconsider their actions in.

MK: So where does the direction need to come from?

MW: That direction should come from the president, absolutely.

MK: Are people tuned in to clues?

MW: I think, with Ford, he didn't have to say that much, but you knew where he was coming from.

MK: How do you know it?

MW: You heard it, too, but his whole reputation, his whole career, everything about that man you knew he was a decent man who believed in public service being public service. But the tone should begin with the president. But within a White House structure, the next layer is probably as important as anything—the chief of staff and these offices that you all are looking into. Their functions can vary, but they need to be the kind of men and women who have the experience—not necessarily the age, but have the experience—to know what's right and to lead both by example and by giving orders. That's where part of those problems came from in the Nixon administration, à la Chuck Colson.

MK: When you decide there's something that's wrong, and it's not going to be fixed, because you have people like Colson there; you don't like what they do, and you think it's time to go, how do you get out?

MW: As I told you, what I would have done was, I would have quit if I had to work for him. That was the situation that I was faced with. I don't know. It depends on the individual and the circumstances. I would never put myself in the place of what somebody else would do in a given situation.

MK: You felt when the FCC thing came along—

MW: That was my favorite job of all time.

MK: —that by that time you had a great job and you also were burned out.

MW: Yes. That was good timing for me. It's funny. I don't know if you've seen the book this guy wrote called *Spin Control*.

MK: Yes. Howard Kurtz.

MW: Is that his name? No, not the *Washington Post* guy. This was a professor. It came out about three or four years ago.

MK: Sure. John Maltese.

MW: The funny thing is, when he interviewed me, I did send him some stuff—he may have some of my stuff, too. I did send him some stuff, and I was interviewed on the phone. He asked me why I left, and I sort of assumed he knew where I went. I said I really was burned out and I was ready to go on to something new. That’s how we ended my chapter in there; it was as if I had dropped off the face of the earth, which is kind of funny. Not that it mattered that much; it just seemed kind of abrupt.

MK: It was a wonderful job opportunity and a wonderful spot to be in.

MW: There are very few opportunities in one’s career where one really can do as much as one possibly can and report mostly to one’s self and one’s conscience. It was a great opportunity. I worked very hard at it. Dick Wiley said: “You’ll get a chance to relax and you don’t have to work so hard.” Yeah, right.

MK: Did you find that your White House experience had prepared you well and in what ways for the FCC job?

MW: Well, my experience over the years in working with the media and broadcast media and the issues that concerned the broadcast arena were particularly helpful. But, of course, the FCC dealt with a lot of other issues [inaudible] and what have you at that point. I started out as a research person. I love issues. That was before we were called “policy wonks” and I don’t really care for that phrase much. But I remember it took me eight years of working in the policy arena before I ended up at the White House, finally. So that total experience—and I’ve been writing articles about issues over a long period of time so I was comfortable in the public policy arena. There was much more substance to the FCC position than there was, obviously, to the White House position, where you could only be superficially involved in all these issues even as you were trying to brief people in more depth on the same issues.

MK: Does it help that being in a White House you have a sense of how the political world is, what the lay of the land is?

MW: I think so. I think that I could temper some of the thinking of some of my staff people, for example. I think I always had very good political instincts but they certainly were honed by my experience. Some people never have it. There were people, without naming names, who will never have the right instincts to know what makes sense in the political arena. And what makes sense sometimes can be the difference between what’s right and wrong—but they don’t understand it. I’ve dealt with some of those people over the years.

MK: What did you learn from your years in the White House that helped you later on?

MW: I don’t know if I can define what I learned. I think it was part of my entire being, what I learned. I think one thing you learn having been there is some patience and sympathy, and recognizing how difficult it is to lead. Politics is so polarized, more and more so these days, it seems. After I left and after Carter won the White House, I sought out the woman whose name escapes me who came in after that.

MK: Pat Barrio.

MW: I suggested that we have lunch and I would be happy to share some of my experience and observations with her to help her in dealing with that job. We did that once. I was hurt that

- Ford wasn't reelected because I had gotten an abbreviated term at the FCC because my term came up in an election year and I had to deal with a spousal conflict which wasn't really a conflict. So I was not too happy about the outcome of the election. But, on the other hand, I thought it was important—and maybe this is also why this project you're doing is so important—to have some kind of a transitional situation where you can explain to people going into these jobs what you've learned and how you have done the job and sort of help them find their way. Once you're there it's not that partisan. You have a job to do and you have to work at it.
- MK: What are some of the patterns you find that repeat themselves about a White House, no matter who's president, or what party it is?
- MW: What did Jerry say to that?
- MK: I didn't ask him that one.
- MW: I hardly see Jerry anymore. You didn't ask him that one?
- MK: He's in Middleburg.
- MW: I know. I see him at some February Group events, this alumni group we have. I think it's like everybody wants to reinvent the wheel when they get there; they're the first people who've ever been elected and been there and had this opportunity. If they could learn a little bit more from the experience of others it might be of assistance to them in going forward. It also might temper the arrogance of some.
- MK: Do you find that in your work now and the people that you know around Washington that there is a layer of bipartisanship that operates way under the radar where there are times when people want to just advance something that's being done, like a policy that maybe is being done or an appointment of somebody, by a White House that people of the opposite party at a very low level, absolutely below everybody's radar, will get involved in because they just want to see something advanced?
- MW: That certainly is a case in some of the legislative issues in my arena, which is broadcasting, as legislation comes about on the Hill, although I deal more with the FCC than I do with the Hill. Even within the FCC it's—political stripes show a lot more in election years than elsewhere I think, certainly in an agency like the FCC. Much of the tone, again, is set by the chairman. You don't necessarily think of issues you deal with in a political party partisan thing. I think that's true also—you're right, at that staff level where people are working to come up with the best possible solution, be it regulatory or legislative. You don't see it so much at the very top, I don't think. It's probably there, I just don't deal with it that much anymore.
- MK: I'm struck that the whole tone of Washington seems to be so partisan, yet there are people that seem to get involved in [all] sort[s] of issues, whether it's an appointment—I have a couple of examples of appointments where there are Republicans who have gotten involved in trying to advance particular appointments even though it's a Democratic administration.
- MW: I think that does go on. I think that certainly does go on.
- MK: It's a heartening kind of the thing because you think of the environment as just almost frozen by partisanship.

MW: Well, some of the charges at the very highest level don't really encourage that kind of effort with this appointment, for example, that was rejected by the Senate. I don't want to get into partisanship here but....

MK: Is there anything else you can think of?

MW: You've really pulled out from my memory banks so much stuff that gets way, way back there; that hasn't been resurrected for a long, long time. I'll probably think of a million things later.

MK: Do you think of it as a positive experience?

MW: Absolutely.

MK: What are the benefits of working in the White House? When people come in, they can see they're going to have work really long hours; it's going to be hard on their families. Why do it?

MW: There is such an excitement of working for the President of the United States, in the White House, the leader of the world. If you ever lose that sense of excitement, you don't belong there. I really think that. I never lost it; I left for other reasons. That's something that money can't measure, working hours can't measure. That's the way it should be. It should bring the best people there. But I think one of the hardest things, going back to what everyone seems to have to learn how on their own, is how to balance your life while you're there, and to realize you can't do it all, to set priorities and go home to your family, and start all over again the next day. That's true in every job.

MK: But do people do that? Once they develop a certain pattern, do they just maintain that pattern?

MW: I think a lot of them do. I think a lot of them do. There's almost a sense of pride of how long you work and how many hours you put in, and so on, and that's wrong.

MK: Did you find that in the number of years you were there—

MW: It's hard to believe I was there for a total of six years, which is a long time.

MK: —that there is a rhythm to how a White House operates? Say, for example, in the first year a lot of attention is put on initiatives and also in personnel and staffing-up the administration; the energy goes there. The second year and third year are policy years where things are moving and more well-defined.

MW: That may well be, but I really have [not] stopped to think about that. But speaking of personnel, there's one initiative that came out of the Nixon administration that very few people are aware of, and on which I've spent some time in the last couple of years. It was Nixon who appointed someone full-time to recruit high-level women in government. Barbara Franklin who was Commerce Secretary, of course, under President Bush came in 1970, I think, working under Fred Malek. The initiatives that were begun then and the women that were appointed, it's a really remarkable story. We put together, Barbara and I and a few others, a not-for-profit organization to do oral histories with all the women that began at that time. Most of them are dying now. We completed about twelve or thirteen of them. We were trying to get a documentary, and a PBS station was going to do it and then

the person went somewhere else and it's sort of in limbo. But we have the taped, not video, interviews with a lot of these people and it's a fascinating story which I think we're going to fold up at the end of this year. But the history is there. And this all began—this is not relevant necessarily to what you're doing, but it's a shame that this story has not received.... Every Administration comes in and says, "We've appointed more women than anybody." But this wasn't big visibility, but they had action memos for every cabinet secretary to come up and fill positions with qualified women.

MK: What about within the White House? What efforts were there there?

MW: There was an article in the *Daily News* about a year into the Nixon administration, with a picture of myself and Ginger Savell, and the caption was "the President's forgotten women". There were very few women at that early part. I think there was more success in the departments and agencies than there was at the White House. Elizabeth Dole, Barbara and I were all there together. Elizabeth is campaigning for president in Virginia today. Barbara went to—

MK: And Esther Peterson [inaudible].

MW: She did, very briefly, but she left about the time Nixon came in. [Inaudible]. But Elizabeth Dole went to the FTC [Federal Trade Commission]; Barbara went to the Consumer Product Safety Commission; and I went to the FCC. We all left at the same time. A friend of ours had a party for us. They went on to bigger and better things after all that. I stayed home because my son was having heart surgery and a few other things. Both of them came out of that period and look how far they went. In fact, we were all founders of Executive Women in Government. We could have met in a phone booth at the time.

MK: What do you think the forces are that seem continually to have few women in a White House? Agencies and departments have increased so much.

MW: I hadn't thought about it, but it's still the case, isn't it?

MK: It still is. And when women are brought in, they tend to be brought in in a couple of showcase positions.

MW: Public Liaison is probably one of them.

MK: Public Liaison has become one of them. That one consistently.

MW: There should be more—I don't know what the situation is in the domestic council or if they even do these things these days. But certainly there's no rationale for not having more women in policy positions.

MK: But they tend not to be. In national security policy—

MW: I haven't paid that much attention.

MK: —they're just not there at all. In domestic policy—

MW: An easy answer is, "Women are not ready to sacrifice that many hours and that much intense work." But I don't think that's it.

MK: I wonder if it's that a White House staff tends to be people that a president is very comfortable with, and that over the years they've tended to deal with men?

MW: Those were the top people that each president brought in.

MK: In dealing with department secretaries and deputies and what not, they're willing to go outside of their experience, but not when they're dealing with people on a daily basis.

MW: By now candidates do have women around them going into it. I don't know. I haven't really explored that. But they were few and far between in both my incarnations.

MK: They still are today. The White House tends to have a real strong male flavor to it.

MW: It's all that macho stuff.

[End of Disc 1 of 1]