

**Sanitized**

Oral History Interview  
With  
GWENDOLYN B. KING  
On  
May 23, 1988



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff  
National Archives and Records Administration

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National Archives and Records Administration  
Nixon Presidential Materials Project

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of  
Gwendolyn B. King.

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Gwendolyn B. King, of Santa Rosa, California, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of two personal interviews conducted on May 23 and 24, 1988, at Alexandria, Virginia and prepared for deposit in the Nixon Presidential Materials Project. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available to researchers after review by regular employees of the National Archives and Records Administration. During such review, portions of the transcripts containing information potentially embarrassing to living persons shall be segregated and restricted from public access until such time as the Director determines that, because of the passage of time or other circumstances, the reason for the restriction no longer exists.

The portion on page 40 of the May 23, 1988 transcript, beginning with the last paragraph and continuing through page 41, line 4, shall be restricted during the lifetime of Helene Drown or Pat Nixon, whichever is shorter.

The portion on page 21 of the May 24, 1988 transcript, beginning with the last paragraph and continuing through the end of that same paragraph on page 22, shall be restricted for twenty-five years from the date of my signature on this deed.

The portion on page 33 of the May 24, 1988 transcript, beginning after "PAS: Hm hmm." and continuing until page 34, "PAS: When she transferred..." shall be restricted during the lifetime of Mrs. Lady Bird Johnson.

(2) Until my death, the tape recordings shall be available only to those researchers who have secured my written authorization. Thereafter, the tape recordings shall be available to all researchers.

(3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime, researchers may

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(4) Copies of the open portions of the interview transcripts, but not the tape recordings, may be provided by the Nixon Presidential Materials Project to researchers upon request. After my death, copies of the tape recordings also may be provided to researchers.

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Donor

Gene King

Date

Feb. 18, 1989

  
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Date

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**DOCUMENT WITHDRAWAL RECORD [NIXON PROJECT]**

DOCUMENT NUMBER	DOCUMENT TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE OR CORRESPONDENTS	DATE	RESTRICTION
1	Transc.	p.11, from last open, "...jobs was to" to first open, "GBK: Hm hmm."	5/23/88	C, D
2	Transc.	p. 11, from last open, "GBK: Hm hmm." to first open, "Well, that wasn't..."	5/23/88	C, D
3	Transc.	p. 12, first statement on page by FJG.	5/23/88	C, D
<del>4</del>	<del>Transc.</del>	<del>p. 40, from last open, "...if you did." to first open, "My first encounter..."</del> OPEN 7/2009	<del>5/23/88</del>	<del>D</del>

FILE GROUP TITLE

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FOLDER TITLE

Oral History with Gwendolyn B. King, 5/23/88

RESTRICTION CODES

- A. Release would violate a Federal statute or Agency Policy.
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Oral history interview with Gwendolyn B. King  
conducted by Frederick J. Graboske and Paul A. Schmidt  
at the Nixon Presidential Materials Project in Alexandria, Virginia  
on May 23, 1988

PAS: Just to start off, we'd like to get a little bit of background on how you came to the White House. Anything that would lead up to the Nixon administration.

GBK: I began working at the White House during the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower administration and my entree was Colonel Robert Schulz, who later became General Schulz, Military Aide to President Eisenhower. He heard that I was going back to work and said, "Well, if you're going back to work, why don't you come to the White House, because we have a temporary job there of cataloging President Eisenhower's pre-Inaugural speeches." I had started working about two weeks earlier at the Pentagon, and Bob Schulz sent a car there for me. I never went back to the Pentagon. I didn't start immediately cataloging the speeches. Roger Steffan, assistant to Sherman Adams, asked me to work in his office. Some months later I went over to the Military Aide's office, did some work there on the speeches. Then Bern [Bernard M.] Shanley, the President's Appointments Secretary, invited me to come on his staff. (There were two Appointments Secretaries. First Bern Shanley and then Tom [Thomas E.] Stephans in the Eisenhower administration.) I remained in the Appointments Office through the [John F.] Kennedy administration and most of the [Lyndon B.] Johnson administration, with several interim assignments in other offices.

In the Nixon administration I transferred to the East Wing

because John Ehrlichman got a call from Mrs. Nixon saying someone had to do something about the condition of her mail: it was piling up. She had brought a minimal staff with her, including a secretary that she had hoped was going to take care of everything. That was Bessie [Elizabeth] Newton, who had been on the Hill with the Nixons earlier. Bessie was a dear sweet person and a good friend of the family, and is now a good friend of mine, but she was literally paralyzed with the volume of mail that was coming in and was not prepared to handle it. In early February 1969 Noble Melencamp got a call from John Ehrlichman saying, "Do you have someone who knows something about correspondence and who can write, who might go over and straighten things out? Mrs. Nixon is very upset about the fact that her mail is just standing there."

I agreed to go over to the East Wing but made it clear I did not want to remain in that job after I had brought the mail up to current working order. I was in for quite a surprise, because I had had an image of Mrs. Nixon, which was often portrayed in the newspapers, of her being "Plastic Pat", and had been influenced by that. I had a feeling I probably would not like working for a First Lady. I'd known Mamie Eisenhower, Jacqueline Kennedy, and Mrs. [Lady Bird] Johnson. Of those three, the only one of them I would have been willing to work for would probably have been Mrs. Johnson, because she was more down to earth. I found, after I got to the East Wing, that Mrs. Nixon was one of the nicest people I had ever met. When she asked me, at the end of six weeks if I would stay on, I decided I'd like to very much.

It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I'd had a long career at the White House, but I think I can say that position was the most rewarding. Mrs. Nixon made working for her such a challenge. She was an inspiration, she worked hard, and she set a very fine example for all the members of her staff. Because of her experience on Capitol Hill she had a deeper appreciation of the value of correspondence, and the value of keeping in touch with the public through her correspondence. She understood its importance, and insisted on the mail being answered promptly. As she said, "All writers deserve a prompt and well thought-out reply." Of course she made my work very rewarding because of that. That brings me up to my getting into the work with Mrs. Nixon.

PAS: So you came in within a couple of weeks of the Inauguration?

GBK: Yes. Each administration, as you know, sends a team to the White House to interview members of the staff who can stay on, the "Transition Team" they call it. On each of those occasions I was asked to stay on in the particular job that I was in. I was also writing messages for the President, and had been in the President's Appointments Office, though not always physically in that office. I went to the EOB [Old Executive Office Building] to work with Noble Melencamp, who had been brought over from [the] State [Department] by the Nixon administration to handle volume correspondence and messages for the President. I went over to the East Wing in early February 1969.

PAS: What other offices were there?

GBK: The other offices there when I first went to the East Wing were

Press Office (Helen Smith), Social Office (Lucy Winchester) and Correspondence (Bessie Newton).

PAS: So it was basically a triumverate at that point?

GBK: That's right.

[Technical conversation relating to the transcription process deleted]

GBK: When I went over to the East Wing, I was a little bit stunned myself because although the letters had been analyzed to some extent, they were in huge baskets, stacked up half way up the wall all over the place.

Somebody said, "How in the world will you handle this?"

During the Johnson administration, I had worked on a special project with James Moyers, Bill Moyers's brother. Bulk mail would never frighten me after that. When Mrs. Nixon was at the White House the correspondence staff developed into a more efficient, larger and more productive staff than had been true in years past. It was because of Mrs. Nixon's appreciation of the value of mail and correspondence, and her personal involvement. If you work for someone and feel they don't care, it can be very demoralizing. We certainly didn't have that problem with Mrs. Nixon. She was very insistent that her mail be handled properly.

Bessie Newton stayed on for awhile as Mrs. Nixon's personal secretary. I think she realized that she just didn't have the stamina or the training to cope with the huge volume of mail. Later on Mrs. Nixon arranged for Bessie Newton to transfer to the State Department to work with Mary Jane McCaffree. (Mary Jane had been with Mrs. Eisenhower before going to the State Department to work on "State" gifts.)

The first thing we did was to install MCST [Magnetic Card "Selectric" Typewriter] machines and hire two cracker-jack operators to run them. I knew that we weren't going to be able to cope with the volume of accumulated mail with the available equipment. What disturbed Mrs. Nixon most of all was the fact that the mail was old, and she did not believe in letting mail go unanswered. She really kept behind us, those five and half years. There were very few letters that didn't get answered within the week. It was a challenge. We goofed of course occasionally. When we goofed she noticed it. She would say, "This incoming letter is dated last week, Gwen. What happened?" [Laughter] Usually I was prepared for that, and I could tell her what happened--that we had tried to get some information from an agency, and they were slow coming through. After that, instead of sending it by memo to an agency, I got the names and telephone numbers of people to talk to. I'd say, "Mrs. Nixon does not want you to write me a memo, she wants you to tell me on the telephone how you are handling this particular thing; or what we should tell this person; or what is the policy that your office is doing; or how can we refer them to you and have you handle it."

FJG: How would she know that you were dilatory in getting the letters out? Would she actually review the outgoing correspondence?

GBK: Oh, yes! She would always look. We would have our reply on top and underneath it the incoming letter. She always lifted up--I watched her work on the mail many times--and she'd say, "Hmm! This is almost a week old." [Laughter] She believed in promptness and we knew that she was right. We had to work

overtime to accomplish what she wanted, but no one complained, because she was an inspiration herself. She would compliment good letters, and she would tell you when it wasn't a good letter.

I remember the weekend I had agreed to go over on a Monday morning to start this job for Mrs. Nixon. Earlier I had gone over to the East Wing and made a survey. Then I had a weekend to think about it. I went to the files and got a carbon of every letter that I could find that Mrs. Nixon had signed. I knew that she had a particular style. I also knew that I was going to run into difficulty because my language had been geared toward Presidential letters and Presidential messages. When I got home on Friday evening and sat by my pool, I thought, "Oh oh! I'm going to be in trouble." The language was quite different from what I'd been accustomed to for years. So I read the letters over and over until a kind of cadence developed. I think by Monday morning I almost had it. It was the only system that I had available to me to try to get familiar with her style. That little background study over the weekend must have helped because the second or third day I was there, she wrote a note saying, "Just the way I would have said it. Thank you." She didn't know me at this time, and the notes were not as friendly or as warm as they became later on. Several weeks later, she came down to meet me. She began calling me on the telephone and discussing things, and I started taking things up to her. The relationship became very workable. Sometimes I would go for two or three days and not see her. Some days I might see her two or three times in one

day, depending on the circumstances or the requirements.

PAS: Did she come down to the offices...

GBK: Not very often.

PAS: ...or [did] you usually [go] up?

GBK: Not very often. We were in close telephone contact. I noticed that was one of your questions. Helen Smith and Lucy Winchester and I could call her at any time. If she were upstairs, she would pick up the phone and we would be able to talk to her.

PAS: She kept an office in the [private living quarters]?

GBK: Yes, she had a small office there, right off of her bedroom. Before Tricia's [(Nixon) Cox] wedding she asked me to come up, and I spent about half of an afternoon with her. She said she would like me to help Tricia with answering her thank-you notes. For awhile we did Tricia's letters on the very fancy script typewriter. After about a few hundred or more Tricia sent me a note down saying she would open the remainder. She used a lot of our language. Tricia had a lot of talent for writing, but we helped her over the volume hump of writing wedding gift thank-you letters. She felt, I think, a little uncertain about the script type, even though she penned the salutation and signed it. I went with Mrs. Nixon to San Clemente to work out a system for handling the correspondence for Tricia's wedding. I spent a week out there with Mrs. Nixon. I think that was when we got to know each other well and became good friends.

FJG: How much time did Mrs. Nixon spend every day, say, on the mail?

GBK: She averaged, except when she might be out on a trip, about four hours a day on her correspondence.

FJG: Wow.

GBK: Some days, I know, it was four and a half. Usually, she worked on the mail in the evenings. Our system was that, at the end of each day, we would send up all the mail in brown envelopes--The large folder-type...

PAS: The accordion folders. Yeah, I've seen those [in the files].

GBK: ...expandable accordion envelopes. There would be three and four and sometimes five of those some evenings. Then we would send her also a folder of envelopes of things that we'd need her guidance on before proceeding. There would be a few occasions when I would recognize that she might want to have something to say about it. It might be a personal friend or something like that. We might draft something, but we wouldn't put it in final form. We'd give her an option of editing the draft. The next morning, when I arrived at the office, between eight-thirty and nine, the folders were always back on my desk. The one exception was the last couple of days that they [the Nixons] were there. She was very punctual about returning her mail. We would go through it very carefully to be sure that she had signed it all. Then I would give it out to Jeff [Fred Jefferson] to dispatch it.

FJG: Did she have a regular schedule that she kept?

GBK: More or less. She would have press opportunities, or whatever you want to call [them]. Connie [Constance C. Stuart] handled her schedule. It was done more through Connie than it was through Coral Schmid, her first Appointments Secretary, because Coral would work through Connie. No appointments were put on the

calendar without checking first with Mrs. Nixon to see if that would suit her to have it on the calendar. I think Connie Stuart would be particularly helpful in an interview.

PAS: Did you report to her then, or were you more or less on your own, as far as...?

GBK: No, I did not "report" to Connie. We kept in very close contact and I think she had a lot of confidence in me. She held staff meetings, and she and I would get together if there were any problems. Connie was very good in her job. She may have been subjected to criticism by some people, but I think she was good for Mrs. Nixon. She served a very necessary function. Mrs. Nixon needed somebody like Connie to ease her into the great demands that the public and the press placed on her as First Lady. Although Helen Smith was in the Press Office, Helen Smith did not have quite that special talent that Connie had of making things a real experience instead of a chore. In other words, we would have a project that we had to work on, and she would make it a great experience that we'd all look forward to instead of something onerous. She not only had the talent for it, she also had the personality for it. We were glad she was there, because she put a spark into the East Wing that certainly did not exist before she came and was missed when she left. I think she felt she had served her function, and Mrs. Nixon recognized that. When she went, she went happily on to other things, confident she had done a good job.

FJG: When you say there was a criticism of her, do you mean from the West Wing?

GBK: Yes. She had a little difficulty sometimes working with [H. R.] Haldeman and others. They tried to stifle some of the things she initiated. They may have thought she was a little overly enthusiastic about certain things.

Early in my tenure in the East Wing I had walked down the hall and back through my staff room. I had a staff room across the hall and also on my side where my office was. I was very surprised to see Ehrlichman and Haldeman strolling through the staff room, looking in the cubby holes and leaning over people's desks and asking questions of my staff. I said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" Then they asked me to give them a tour of my office, and I did. I showed them how our correspondence system worked. The backlog had been taken care of. Things were now running smoothly, and Mrs. Nixon was happy about it. I suppose they wanted to see how we operated.

But shortly afterwards I got a memo saying, "We would like for you to report to so and so," in substance, putting a West Wing umbrella over our correspondence operation. I didn't think it would be at all to Mrs. Nixon's liking. I called Mrs. Nixon and went upstairs to see her. I didn't have any problem with the West Wing from then on out. I told Mrs. Nixon that if they were going to change the system that much, I didn't think I was the person who should stay in that job.

PAS: They wanted some sort of ultimate control?

GBK: Yes. Precisely. I didn't think it necessary and I didn't think Mrs. Nixon would approve. I suspected how she felt about one of the gentlemen. After I talked to her about it, I didn't hear

anymore until she called me the next morning and said, "Business as usual."

PAS: You don't know what she did?

GBK: No, I do not. But I do know that I did not from that point on have any interference from the West Wing. Apparently they felt that she was content with the work that we were doing. I did find out later that some of my drafts were being used over in the West Wing to answer their letters.

FJG: When you say that you knew her feelings about one of the gentlemen, do you mean Haldeman? I say that because I've talked to Bob, and he says that one of his jobs was to

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GBK: Hm hmm.

FJG:   
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GBK: Well, that wasn't the only reason. I could tell you this, I may take it out later, but Mrs. Nixon was very upset with Bob Haldeman and said so. She did not approve of Haldeman's videotaping everything. She was very much opposed to that. This is something that has always disturbed me, that he has reams and reams and reams of film, meetings, State Dinners, everything. I imagine he has the most complete pictorial history of any Presidency of any person that ever lived. There was some question that came up about who was paying for the film. Of course, I don't know the answer to that. Now, I may be betraying a confidence in saying that, and I may want to delete it from the tape, but that's what happened.

FJG:

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GBK: I would be very pleased to hear that about Bob Haldeman. I liked John Ehrlichman very much. He was very kind to me when my first granddaughter was born. He was going to San Francisco to give a speech and offered me a ride. Mrs. Nixon called him up and suggested that he take me out there. I'm very glad to see him doing the things that he is doing now. He has done his penance by going to New Mexico, living among and helping the people there. I thought he was basically a man of integrity, who got "White House-itis". But I never felt at any point that Haldeman was anything but someone that I did not like. He antagonized many people around there. Of course I was prejudiced because I knew that he antagonized Mrs. Nixon on many occasions.

PAS: Would he deal with Connie then if he had any dealings with the East Wing?

GBK: Yes. Well, remember now, that Charles was in Haldeman's office.

PAS: Charles Stuart.

GBK: Yes. So, they worked pretty closely together. Haldeman and Ehrlichman were in close contact with Connie and she knew them much better than I did because she was more into the press things that they would also be involved in. [She] saw them not only in the office situation but also in the evening at White House social functions. Connie would be the person to tell you more about them.

PAS: We were talking about the East and West Wings. I had a question

here. What about the influence from the East to the West Wing? Was there some that you know of? First, was there an intentional influence, or do you think maybe there was an unintentional influence?

GBK: The West Wing discounted us to some extent. I think they looked upon us as social butterflies mainly. I do think that the work that went on in the correspondence office did alter that opinion. I don't think that they expected Mrs. Nixon to be the person she was, to handle her mail. One thing I think you asked was, how did they feel about Mrs. Nixon. I don't think that they reckoned with the fact that she was going to get as involved as she did with correspondence and wanted to be informed about everything that was going on. I think they thought that she was just going to do First Lady things like meeting school children, and things like that. But Mrs. Nixon was intensely interested in the Right To Read program as well as many other issues. I know when they said, you have to have a project, a First Lady project, she said, "But I'm involved in so many things. I am interested in education." Because she had been a teacher herself and recognized the value of it, she promoted the Right To Read program. She was also very interested in continuing to make the White House a museum of monumental things for the American people. Also she wanted very much, since she was the First Lady, to make Americans aware that it was open to them and that it was their house. I think she placed more emphasis on the fact that the White House was the place for all Americans than any other First Lady. They were welcome, and she placed a great emphasis

on it. She underscored that in several instances by having the candlelight tours so that you could see the White House, the way it looks in the evening, and having tape recordings made for the blind. She wanted to make sure that the blind enjoyed it. The special tours she had for the handicapped at a special time so that the handicapped would know that the White House was theirs also. Of course, what she did for the blind was just wonderful; so many groups of blind children would come in from all over the country, and they would have access to the recording. It was exciting to see them touch the draperies, because they were allowed to handle things.

PAS: I envy them. I'd like to do something like that.

FJG: Would Mrs. Nixon go through with them sometimes?

GBK: She would meet certain groups whenever her schedule allowed. She was very good about that, and I guess some of the photographs reflect that. Many times she would be with groups and she seemed to enjoy it. Sometimes she might do something on the spur of the moment. She was such a natural person, and it bothered me when people would call her "Plastic Pat". Of course, she was well-coiffured, but, you know, a lot of people (not me), a lot of people are.

PAS: They'd have criticism if she wasn't too. [Laughter]

GBK: Yes. As the saying goes, "you're damned if you do and damned if you don't." She was always a spontaneous person and a very warm-hearted person, and she certainly endeared herself to me very early.

PAS: Do you think the West Wing relations were born out of a prejudice

of prior First Ladies or just women in general?

GBK: I think it was a combination of both. I felt sad to learn the way the First Lady's correspondence continued after I left. I will tell you later on an experience that I had during the [Jimmy] Carter administration. I know that Mrs. Eisenhower dealt very little with her correspondence. She dealt with some of it, but only just as much as she could get by with. Most of her correspondence was handled and signed by Mary Jane McCaffree. Mrs. Johnson, I think, was interested in her correspondence, but she was a very busy woman on the outside too. They didn't have the correspondence staff, and they didn't have the volume of mail.

I think that there was a lot of chauvinistic feeling about women on the staff. Not having a full appreciation of the fact that they could contribute something to the overall Presidency. I think that they can. I think that may be one of the purposes for which Connie was brought in for.

[END SIDE ONE]

[BEGIN SIDE TWO]

GBK: There were a couple of things that I'd wanted to say that I thought would be special to Mrs. Nixon, and how she ran her staff, and why she had such a good rapport with her staff. I jotted a few things down, and I don't want to forget any of them. Her prescription for life, of course, was indicative of the way she felt about things. "Believe, work, achieve--then share with others so that the seemingly impossible dreams will come true." I have a note here that says, "I'm saving this correspondence to

show to RN;" she always called him "RN" in all of her notes. She was a good conduit to the President for some letters. You asked about the letters addressed to the President and Mrs. Nixon. They all came over to our office. Some of them would be strictly official, and Tom [Thomas R. McCoy] would give them to me. Then I would make the decision whether I should send them over to Noble Melencamp and have him do what he wanted to do or send them to the office in the West Wing that would handle it. If I felt that it was something we were capable of, and it [was] appropriate for us to handle, then we would go ahead and handle it in our office. But many times things did get to the President by someone writing to the President and Mrs. Nixon, or just writing to Mrs. Nixon alone, and saying, "I have not had any response from the President." I assure you that those letters did get a reply. Now whether it was signed by the President or not, I can't tell you, but I know that some were. Some were signed by someone on the President's staff. At least it did come to the attention of the West Wing. Here's a note I can show you. She said, "Gwen, I'm saving these to show to RN and then I'll send them down again," just to show you that it did happen that way.

As a person Mrs. Nixon was always very sensitive to personal problems of members of the staff. I remember very well when my mother was ill and dying in a nursing home in Maryland, Mrs. Nixon would call me in the mornings and say, "How are things?" She knew that I went by every morning before I came to work and on my way home. It was a traumatic thirteen months for me, but

she would boost me up and say, "I remember when Dick's mother was so ill." She was a great comfort and inspiration to me at that time. Once she even had the President write a note to my mother in the nursing home. She sent her flowers occasionally.

But, oh, was she ever frugal with supplies. Now, if anyone ever wanted a budget balanced, you just get Pat Nixon on it. She used every scrap of paper. This indicates it. [Showing a note from Mrs. Nixon]. She would say, "Please send me up some more legal pads," and she used those brown envelopes and those folders over and over. Within the expandable folders we would have other folders on the subjects of what they were. She went through every single one of those things and read the incoming letters. They would get so worn, and finally I would say, "Don't you think that this one's on its last leg?" She would say, "Well, we can use a rubber band around it," or something like that. [Laughter] I had dozens of envelopes that she would scratch over and then write on and scratch over that, and we'd keep putting labels on top of labels on top of labels. So, we did not break the White House by supplies or anything else like that.

She had an excellent sense of humor and she was always boosting our morale. She got some very poignant letters and she also got some very funny letters. Maybe this came out in the paper, but when the President and Mrs. Nixon--were they given some oxen or did they take oxen?

PAS: They took the oxen.

GBK: They took the oxen named Matilda and Milton.

FJG: Yes.

GBK: Yes, that's right. They were named Milton and Matilda. She got the funniest letter from a man somewhere out in Ohio, saying, "Dear Mrs. Nixon, my name is Milton and my wife is named Matilda." [Laughter] But anyway he said, "I'm very proud that you named the oxen you gave after my wife and me." She got the biggest kick out of letters like that. She got a lot of them, they eased up the day.

PAS: What was the percent--I mean, you were talking about her looking at the mail. Did she see incoming more than she saw outgoing or was it more even? She didn't see everything did she, or...

GBK: No.

PAS: ...basically everything?

GBK: No. The First Lady's office, as you well know, got a lot of requests for autographed photographs, for the recipes. Of course, those did not necessarily have to have a covering letter, and if it did, it would be over my signature and not over hers. Birthday letters or cards, we handled all of that. She saw everything, of course, for her signature. There were very few instances where we would have to send her a letter before we had done a reply on it. We just understood each other. Once in a while we would have just a small folder of letters, and I would say, "I would like to do it like this, but do you have another thought on it?" Generally speaking, I would go ahead and handle the reply and have it right ready to be signed. And very few instances did she make changes. Once in awhile--I remember the first one that she made. She said, "The letter is fine, but

[she] does happen to be a good friend of mine, I've known her for years. She's not very well now, and I'd like to warm it up a little bit and just change the last paragraph;" and then we redid it. But normally speaking I was very lucky, because she changed so few of my things.

PAS: I noticed a memo in doing Susan Porter's files. Someone, I don't know who it's to or from, it was someone who's mentioning that they were told from Mrs. Nixon not to write a letter to someone saying that, "Mrs. Nixon wants me to tell you," if Mrs. Nixon in fact had no knowledge...

GBK: That's right.

PAS: ...of the information.

GBK: She was adamant about that. Very early in the game we used the phrase, "the President and I", and she would have none of that. You will probably notice, if you go through the files, that all of her letters will say "we" or "our family". She said, "Please, in the future, do not use 'the President and Mrs.'"

PAS: Did she think that was too formal?

GBK: She thought it was too formal and too cold. I do have it here, you're probably not interested, but that's what she said. She always wanted to do a little bit extra. Here is an example. A little lady wanted to embroider her [Mrs. Nixon's] signature and make a quilt of various names. The incoming letter got detached from the piece of cloth sent in for her signature.

PAS: So you weren't able to send it to her.

GBK: Never were able to send it to her. We thought maybe she'd write back, but she didn't.

PAS: Did you have many dealings with members of the staff of the West Wing, with your counterparts on the West side?

GBK: Yes, I did. I had a lot of dealings, first with Noble Melencamp, particularly on policy letters and things like that, and later on with Roland Elliot after Noble left and went to the Embassy in Moscow. I had memos, several memos you will probably find in my files from John Dean. And I honestly can't remember why we had the correspondence going back and forth. Of course, a lot of memos back and forth with Bruce Kehrli, because Bruce Kehrli handled personnel affairs over in the West Wing personnel office. When I assumed the administrative duties in the office, anyone who got a raise or hired or fired, what have you, I'd deal with Bruce Kehrli. I didn't have any direct official contact with people like John Ehrlichman or Haldeman, there was no reason for it.

PAS: So you were more or less an entity unto yourself...

GBK: That's right, yes.

PAS: ...in the First Lady's office?

GBK: Yes, that's right. I did not feel that I had to report to anyone except to her. Even when Connie was there, I respected the fact that she was the chief of staff. But she would also let me have a free hand in running my operations, and we had no conflicts there. I reported directly to Mrs. Nixon and not through Connie at all.

PAS: What about checking on the official line on certain issues? Would you have to do a check with the West Wing before you really were able to give an answer in certain things?

GBK: Not always.

PAS: On more sensitive issues?

GBK: Yes, yes, on some issues. I think I had some notes here of some of the things that did require my checking with them. So many issues are so different. Certainly when we had so many letters about the drug issue. We were talking earlier about Egil ["Bud"] Krogh. I don't know why Bud Krogh was necessarily so much involved in that, but he seemed to be, we called him our drug man. He came over just to explain what the administration, or the government, was trying to do. I took notes and incorporated these in the letters and made a draft of it and sent it up. Mrs. Nixon said it was fine, and then we used it generally. Let's see, what were some of the other issues? We have so many serious things these days that you almost forget what it was like back in the '70s. It seemed like a tumultuous time, but now you'd think it must have been very peaceful by comparison.

FJG: How about the busing issue?

GBK: My recollection is that Mrs. Nixon was very sensitive to the mothers who wrote saying that their children had to be bused too far from home. Although she felt that we had to have a healthy respect for the law, she was very sympathetic to that concern. My recollection is that she did not approve of the extent busing took. I don't remember precisely.

PAS: What about women's issues, as far as women's rights?

GBK: She was very much for women's rights. You may remember that she was disappointed that the President did not appoint a woman to the Supreme Court, and I believe said so publicly. She was not

an extremist, but she certainly believed in women's rights. Did that answer the question?

PAS: Hm hmm.

GBK: I wasn't trying to skirt the issue at all.

PAS: Were there times when you would hear from the West Wing, and maybe they'd say, "You're not quite...?"

GBK: No. Usually if there were any reason to question it, we would check on the West Wing policy. I don't recall us making many, if any mistakes on policy.

PAS: You'd get it from her then.

GBK: That's right, because she read the newspapers, and I read the newspapers and we kept up pretty well with what was going on. Many times we would have to write to a Congressman about something. Then, of course, I would check with the legislative department to be sure I knew what I was doing on that and sometimes turn it over to them to answer it. Sometimes it might not be appropriate for her to answer the letter, if they were talking strictly about legislation that was pending. When it wouldn't be appropriate for us to fully reply, we would always give them a reply saying that "we think that you will get a more substantive answer if we refer [you] to the people who [are] actually handling that, and therefore you'll be hearing from so and so." We always said "in a few days", and they always killed us for that, because they never got around to their mail as fast as we did. Of course, they probably had a bigger volume too.

FJG: One of Mrs. Nixon's main interests, that I recall, was in voluntary action. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

GBK: Yes, I can tell you a lot about her....

FJG: Tell us a lot about it.

[Laughter]

GBK: Well, she firmly believed in being a volunteer; she had been a volunteer herself. I think that she certainly did inspire volunteerism, and it certainly did encompass the whole world by the time she left office, I think, because stories got out of her visiting the volunteer centers throughout the country. I've given a lot of speeches in California, and I speak to a lot of women's groups and a lot of men's groups. I don't think I've ever spoken to any group that [someone] hasn't come up to me afterwards and said, "I'm glad that you said what you did about Pat Nixon's volunteerism, because she visited our center, and we will never forget it." Or, "She sent us a message that we had framed," or something like that. So I think that she encouraged volunteerism and gave it such emphasis that she encouraged many people to undertake a volunteer project. If it had not been for the fact that she had been such an inspiration as a volunteer, I may not have chosen something quite as demanding as Hospice caregiver. I think that probably she affected a lot of other people maybe that same way.

She visited many volunteer centers. She also gave a shot in the arm to the Right To Read program. She had Susan Porter and me go over to Education [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] one day. We spent a whole day over there to find out exactly what they were doing about the Right To Read program and how the White House could help. We got very much involved in the

Right To Read program, which was also tied in with volunteer work because many people volunteered to help others learn to read through that. Her program in volunteering was extensive. She visited all types of volunteer centers throughout the United States.

FJG: There was a fellow named Edwin Etherington, who was head of the volunteer....

GBK: What did...?

FJG: A fellow named Edwin Etherington, remember that?

GBK: I don't remember his name.

FJG: I think he was the head of the center for voluntary action. I wondered if he had any connection with you or Mrs. Nixon.

GBK: No. The name doesn't ring a bell with me, yet it seems to me that one day I went to an office on Pennsylvania Avenue and talked with someone. I don't recall that name.

PAS: Which were her favorite charity organizations? Did she have any; can you think of one?

GBK: American Heart Association, March of Dimes were special, but she didn't have one favorite that I recall. She always wanted to support their efforts through her messages to them.

PAS: Were they more geared to children rather than old people?

GBK: No, because she would go into hospitals where there were elderly women volunteering for things, and I think she probably inspired them. It wasn't so much with working with children at all, although she was very good with that on a one on one basis. It was volunteering in any way you could help. As she often said, "Helping others is the only thing that ever really creates

the spirit of a nation," and she believed that. She also said that "caring for other people is the thing that creates the spirit of a nation and that people have got to have heart and concern in the human involvement that reaches another." She kept saying that the only way to go is people helping people.

PAS: The individual basis much more than the government helping?

GBK: Yes, definitely.

PAS: Was that reflected in her correspondence?

GBK: Very much so. You'll notice that in all the messages that we wrote. She took a great interest in the individual message that we had to draft for her for various organizations, particularly those who were struggling, trying to develop something along the lines of volunteering. She was very sensitive to the wording. I think we did some good messages in that time, at least we felt good about it.

FJG: Yes. That's fine. Were Julie [(Nixon) Eisenhower] and Tricia interested in volunteerism as well, or did they have other interests?

GBK: I was trying to remember last night something that Julie was interested in for a rather brief time, but it escapes me. I have a feeling that, if Watergate had not come up, they might have become much more involved in various programs, but Watergate consumed their energy, time and emotional strength. Earlier, Julie went to Catholic University to get her Masters Degree in special education. Tricia was intensely interested in the White House and the historical background of the White House. [She] did a lot of reading about it. She made a tremendous effort to

conduct a televised tour, I believe it was in 1971, through the White House. That was a rather difficult thing for Tricia to do, because she doesn't like to be in the public light at all. Julie is a natural. She's much more of an extrovert, and does it easily, and with great flair.

FJG: Hm hmm. How about during the '72 campaign? I know that Julie and Tricia campaigned extensively.

GBK: Yes, they certainly did.

FJG: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

GBK: Well, I can't really tell you a lot about it, but I do know that they were very vigorous about it. They even got Cindy [Cynthia] Vanden Heuvel, who was on my staff, involved. In fact, Cindy and I went down to the convention in Miami, because we had certain duties assigned to us. I worked with Mrs. Nixon, and Cindy worked with Julie and Tricia. I can't tell you exactly what they did. Connie was on the staff at that time directing their appearances. and things like that. The West Wing, of course, had a lot to say about it. They were more under the umbrella of the West Wing for what they did during the campaign than they were under the East Wing. For that reason, except for what I would read or see in staff reports, I really didn't get involved in much of their activities. I knew it was happening, I knew what they were doing, but I was not personally involved in any of it. Sometimes I would write a few remarks, but that would be about the extent of my participation in it.

PAS: Did you write remarks for speeches or...?

GBK: Just remarks, not long speeches. I did earlier, I'd make some

little Rose Garden remarks and things for a particular occasion for the President. I started doing that during the Eisenhower administration. Helen Smith did some of them, I did some. A lot of times Mrs. Nixon would send things she had received from the West Wing down to me and say, "This doesn't sound quite like me; could you re-do it?" She wanted to write the way she spoke, and she wanted it to sound not as though she had struggled over a letter, but that she [was] talking to the person. It might not be everybody's style, but it was definitely hers, and that's what she wanted.

FJG: I know that after Connie Stuart left there was some thought of having Julie come in to assist her mother. Could you talk a little bit about that?

GBK: Yes, I will, and in fact I've even jotted down a few things down here. Julie did use Connie Stuart's office on a few occasions, and she did acquaint herself with all the workings of everybody else in the office. But her specific involvement was centered on press things at that time. She wasn't particularly into the correspondence; I think she felt it was running all right. Her travel and her appearances, of course, were better known, and her ardent defense of her father in the Watergate area was what she really got interested in as time went on. Do you remember the date that Connie left?

PAS: January of 1973, I think. Was it that late?

GBK: It probably was that late, it could have been later than that. I do know that her office stayed vacant for awhile. Then someone said that Julie was going to take it over, and everybody was very

excited to have her down there. She came and stayed a few days, but she found that she really couldn't work very well down there, because there were things that she wanted to check with people in the West Wing. I think she did not particularly like coming down to the offices and having the public exposure and having to chat with people in the office. It didn't work out insofar as her taking over things that ran in the office. She did take over some functions for her mother, it's quite true, and she did a good job of that. If her mother couldn't appear, then Julie would do certain things. You asked how did it work out. My feeling is it really didn't work out as it was originally planned. She was very much involved, but not in an East Wing office. Connie's administrative duties fell on my shoulders. I handled the hiring and firing on Mrs. Nixon's staff--the Social Office and the office that did all of the scripting, Sandy [Sanford L.] Fox's office, that was part of the Social Office too. I worked with Bruce Kehrli, on moving the official papers.

FJG: How did Watergate effect the functioning of the office?

GBK: The greatest effect was morale, which Mrs. Nixon was great in keeping up. The morale kept up pretty well until the very last. The worst thing that happened was that the mail really increased; it almost doubled. It came in such great volumes that we had more form letters than we really wanted to have. We were sending up sometimes as many as five hundred letters a night for Mrs. Nixon to sign. With the form letters that was easy enough for us to do because the girls could really churn them out. At that time we had three MCST machines. They worked beautifully for us;

they served our purpose at that time. Sometimes Mrs. Nixon would put a little personal note at the bottom of them. She read them, strangely enough, even with the form letter she would read the incoming, because I think she wanted just to get the feel of how things were going. She continued, and we continued to move the mail normally. We did not turn down anything that we would normally have done until that last Monday night before the Nixons left on Friday. Monday night we sent up a tremendous envelope of mail, and the next morning when I came to my desk, it was all back on my desk in my office, and it was not signed. That was the first time that had ever happened, and that's when we knew things were coming to an end.

PAS: Was her morale then greatly reduced over the months?

GBK: She kept up wonderfully up until that last week. Monday night they went on the Sequoia. Tuesday night the President told the family he was resigning. She did not sign any mail after that. She called me on Tuesday and talked with me very briefly. I didn't hear from her again. I was there in the East Room that last day, Friday, August 9, 1974, and I was sitting just below her, and I must admit I had tears in my eyes. I was trying to be very stoical about this, as stoical as she was, because she was being so brave. I happened to glance up at her, and I think that I saw a tiny tear. So I moved over behind somebody; the empathy was just too much for me. I was the first person she contacted from San Clemente. They left on Friday, and on the following Tuesday morning I was standing in the hall talking to someone. One of the girls in the office came yelling down the hall. [She]

said, "Gwen, Mrs. Nixon is on the line!" So I closed my double doors and I talked with her for about an hour. She was fine, she never complained. She's never complained, which has always been a marvel to me. I think that she met the days of Watergate with that infinite calm and composure, serenity and acceptance that I think characterized her whole life. I think she's had many battles to fight and to overcome. I think her badge of courage is still very much intact, and certainly will be an inspiration to me as long as I live.

PAS: Do you think that she saw the resignation coming, or did anybody really see that?

GBK: I can't be really sure, but I think not. I saw her the week before, on either Thursday or Friday. The West Wing cut off her newspapers, and I thought that was a rather strange thing to do. She was an adult woman, and she was going to find out what was going on. She knew she could get newspapers from me. So I went up there with a copy. She seemed a little discouraged at that time, but she always maintained her spirits right to the very end. I think she has reason to feel bitter, but I've never seen any evidence of any bitterness. This is quite remarkable for someone who went through what she went through.

PAS: Did your office or the First Lady's Office get the whole siege mentality of the West Wing that is said to have characterized this period?

GBK: You mean as far as files and things were concerned?

PAS: At the end, because of Watergate, was it, "everybody's against us now," and that kind of thing? The sort of thing the West Wing

might have been feeling.

GBK: No. I don't think we had that....

PAS: Did the mail change at all?

GBK: We were getting such a tremendous volume of support letters. Of course, I think the critical letters were probably going over to the other side, to the President, and would not be directed to Mrs. Nixon. I think that people realized that Mrs. Nixon really hadn't done anything. We had a minimum, maybe two or three critical letters out of a volume of five hundred letters. She saw those as well as the others, because she wanted to know what was going on. I discovered she did not shrink from anything. The one thing that she wanted least of all was to ever do anything to offend people or hurt people. She was very sensitive to people's feelings. I don't think she has a vicious or malicious bone in her whole body. I've seen her in some very difficult circumstances.

FJG: [Robert U.] Woodward and [Carl] Bernstein have written in The Final Days, that Mrs. Nixon took to drinking. It seems that some....

GBK: What about it?

FJG: That Mrs. Nixon began drinking heavily in the final days.

GBK: That was the most ridiculous thing I've ever read. I traveled with her and I've been in her home. She may have a cocktail before dinner at San Clemente. But she did not drink to excess, and it was absolutely ridiculous to say that she did. Mrs. Nixon did not take to drinking. It's quite true, she did not go out in public as much, because what First Lady wants to go out and have

abuses hurled at her. I think she was quite wise not to do it. I'm defending her because I know that it is the truth, that she did not. She never drank after dinner. So, there was no truth to that. That is one thing that really upset her about the book; that upset her very much. I won't forgive him [Woodward]. I heard you say he was in here, wasn't he?

FJG: Yes.

GBK: O.K. I'm glad I wasn't in at the same time.

FJG: Tell us the martini story about the President.

GBK: Well, Julie doesn't tell this whole story, but I'll tell you this story. I think you might find it very interesting. I might cut some of it out. This was the first time I visited Mrs. Nixon after Watergate. It was a rather warm afternoon when we got down there, so Mrs. Nixon and I immediately took a dip in the pool. We were in the swimming pool when he [President Nixon] came over from his office at the compound across the way. I had bumped into President Nixon a couple of times when he had come upstairs when I was working with her. But I never felt that I really knew him. I hadn't had an occasion to be with them except with big groups, or when he might be over in the East Wing. I was a little bit worried about how it was going to be being a guest in his home. He came to the pool, and he leaned over and said, "What would you like to drink?" "Well," I said, "I'd like a vodka martini." After our swim we went into the living room and had the martinis. He started asking me a lot of questions, and I thought, "Well, that martini was awfully good." He offered me a second one. I looked at Manolo [Sanchez] sort of like this:

"How strong are they?" He pointed, "The President mixes them, I didn't." I didn't finish the second one because dinner was ready, and I left part of it. We went to the dinner table about seven o'clock, I think, and at ten o'clock he was still sitting at the dinner table talking with us. (Julie mentions this incidentally in her book, that he sat late at night chatting with us.)

Well, it was a lengthy conversation, and I really pulled a boner. We were chatting on and I was telling him an "off-the-record" story about President Johnson. It wasn't too critical, but it was just something that I had not talked about. I stopped in mid-flight, and I said, "You're not taping this, are you?" [Laughter] Manolo just froze, he was behind us, serving. Mrs. Nixon looked at me, and I thought, "Oh, what have I said!" All of a sudden Mrs. Nixon burst out laughing. She said, "I told you she was candid, Dick." And he said, "No, no." It just came out. I know I shouldn't have said it. At first everything froze, but then he saw it was funny and he laughed. Then he assured me he wasn't [taping], so I went on talking. He seemed very interested in my assessment of the Presidents I had worked for.

[END SIDE TWO]

[BEGIN SIDE THREE]

FJG: Why don't you tell us a little bit about Mrs. Nixon's interest in the White House south lawn, as we were just discussing when the tape ran out?

GBK: Oh, about the fact that she instigated a booklet on the White House grounds, which included not only some historical facts

about Presidents planting various trees and where they were located? The chart originally came from [the Department of] Interior but wasn't available or accessible to the public. Mrs. Nixon thought that would be nice to include in a booklet. We had many many requests from the public for this. While the public couldn't always go on the south grounds to look at it. There was one other thing: in her tours, not only did she have special tours for the blind and the handicapped, but she also tried to make a point of at least periodically (she worked very closely with Clem [Clement E.] Conger on this) to have special art exhibits. I remember the time Andrew Wyeth came in, and that was a very popular exhibit.

Mrs. Nixon was also responsible for returning priceless art treasures that had originally been part of the White House. Some were just stored away, but others were in private homes. Clem Conger ferreted things out from all over the country, and a number of very valuable historical objects and pieces of furniture were returned to the White House. Mrs. Nixon was very interested in that project.

FJG: Well, to continue our talk about the East Wing relationship with the West Wing. Why don't you, if you would, tell us a little about General [Alexander M.] Haig?

GBK: General Haig was second in command in the National Security Council when Mr. [Henry A.] Kissinger was there. General Haig, frequently, because he was a general, would wander into the Military Aide's Office, East Wing. He didn't cause the furor among my young ladies on the staff that Henry Kissinger did. (I

always knew when Henry Kissinger came down the hall. I'd look out in the staff room and say, "Is Henry out in the hall?", and [someone would] say, "He just went down the hall".) General Haig came over occasionally and was pleasant enough among the staff. I didn't get to know him very well personally. The Aide's office, as you probably know, is a very social office, and they believe in having parties. Any excuse for a party at the end of the day. From time to time the members of our staff might be invited down, and [the aides were] very nice to do it, but sometimes it could be a bit disruptive when we had had a long, busy day. That was mostly my contact with General Haig. Later on I heard, and I didn't actually hear him say it, but I heard someone who had been in the room when General Haig said it, said it was the thing that he wanted to do was to go to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. What is the post called--not ambassador to NATO, but...

FJG: He was the Supreme Commander.

GBK: Supreme Commander was what I was trying to remember, of NATO. The discussion, the person said, "Well, that's fine, Andy [Andrew J.] Goodpaster's term will be up in a couple of years," or sixteen months, I don't remember the exact time. And he said, "But I want it now," and he got it very promptly. Andy Goodpaster was sent to West Point. That, of course, was always something that did not make me like General Haig very much, because I'd known Andy Goodpaster very well. He'd been an excellent Staff Secretary under Eisenhower. He had had some pretty sad tragedies in his own life. He was doing a splendid job according to

reports. I thought it was not a very kind thing for General Haig to do, using his position in the White House to bump someone: not let them finish out their term, and in a sense he cut short a very blossoming career.

The other thing that really disturbed me was early on in the early days; he was coming back and forth, not frequently, but enough for me to see him in the Military Aide's office. I went to a dinner party one night, a rather small dinner party, and a woman was there. All of a sudden my ears began to prick up, because she said she had given General Haig a tennis lesson on the White House tennis court that week. She said, "He invited us up to the office," and I said, "Which office?" Apparently he had taken somebody right into the office. [She] said, "Some messages came in on the teletype, and he showed them to us". I thought, here this person had no clearance whatsoever, and was in a "sensitive area" office. She was at a dinner party, spouting off that General Haig was inviting people to his office after a tennis lesson for a drink. That's all I have to say about General Haig.

FJG: Why don't you then tell us about Dr. Kissinger?

GBK: Well, I don't know too much about Dr. Kissinger, except that he seemed to cause a lot of excitement among my staff when he would come down [to] the East Wing. I had an inner office and an outer office leading into the hallway, but the staff room has two open doors and they can see anybody passing. I'd hear this clatter of people getting up from their desks, and they were just all atwitter when Kissinger came--and I never understood it. I had

tremendous admiration for Kissinger's successful negotiations. It troubled me a lot to have him around and talking a lot, because he had that gravelly voice that you always wanted to clear his throat for him. He was not easily understood with his heavy accent. I didn't dislike Henry Kissinger, but I didn't see all the physical charm that apparently my girls attributed to him. Maybe it was because he was such a public figure.

FJG: Did you ever have any contact with Charles Colson?

GBK: No. No I didn't. The last time I saw him was when we had lunch across the street at the Washington Hotel one day. He came and sat down with some of his other friends, and I thought he was talking about office things a little bit on the loud side. That's the last time I saw him. I had no dealings with him at all.

PAS: I just wanted to ask you if there was much of a difference in dealing with the First Lady's correspondence as opposed to the First Family, the Eisenhowers and the Coxes. You said Cindy Vanden Heuvel dealt mostly with their correspondence.

GBK: Yes. If there were anything such as a message or some brief remarks or something that Julie wanted, I handled it. It didn't happen more than a couple of times with Tricia, but Julie, of course, did more things publicly. Cindy strictly handled letters and not messages or remarks. If there were a special letter, Julie would sometimes send it to me and say, "Gwen, would you draft a reply for this for my signature?" Normally Cindy answered most of the routine correspondence and requests for autographed photographs. Both Tricia and Julie had special

recipes, and that was a popular item to write and ask for. They had recipes with their signature on it. She handled a lot of that.

PAS: Julie had the embroidered seal, too.

GBK: You're talking about the Presidential Seal on her stationery, no she did not. No. She, as I recall, she used the White House stationery.

PAS: I don't mean the stationery. I mean she'd embroidered that Presidential Seal.

GBK: Oh yes, the crewel work. She did the Presidential Seal in crewel.

PAS: What do you think they saw as their role as the First Family?

GBK: I think that Julie saw as her role to project an image as a close knit family, a First Family that was secure within itself and therefore secure enough for her father to head the nation. She wanted to contribute as much as she could by public appearances and in speaking as she could to let people get to know members of the First Family. Tricia was a little more reticent to go out in public and do things. I think she did a great job in the televised White House tour. That in itself was enough to compensate for a lot of the other appearances, maybe, of Julie. Just to present a unified front; I think they probably saw that as their most important function. In fact they were probably more unified in the White House than they had been before, because earlier they were in school or doing other things. Now they were all pulling together as a family.

PAS: Did that happen to increase with Watergate?

GBK: Yes, of course, I think that the solidarity was there all the way through. I think there were some wounds to heal, but they were loyal. Julie and Tricia were very loyal to their parents and still defend them, getting together with them quite frequently. I know that every time I was at San Clemente visiting, Julie called her mother almost every day, and Tricia called every day. There is constant contact, and concern about both of them. The family is very close knit.

PAS: You had mentioned something while taking the tour [of the Nixon Project facilities] about when the Nixons went back to San Clemente after the resignation, how Tricia and Eddie went with them and provided a lot of support.

GBK: Tricia and Ed got on the helicopter at the White House on August 9th. We realized then that Tricia and Ed were accompanying the President and Mrs. Nixon to San Clemente. Ed Cox was a junior partner in the New York law firm, and used his first vacation time to be out there with President Nixon and with Mrs. Nixon right after August 9th. Ed gave a lot of support and was someone that President Nixon was able to talk to and to walk the beach with. It must have been a rather traumatic period for all of them. Tricia was there with her mother. I think a lot of people probably don't remember this, and I think it was a pretty wonderful thing for them to do. Maybe the expected thing and the natural thing, but it fulfilled a great need. I'd not really known Ed too well because he wasn't at the White House often. But his devoting his time to being with the Nixons gave me an insight into Ed's character. I've not heard anything since to

change that positive portrait of him.

FJG: One of Mrs. Nixon's closest personal friends was...

GBK: Helene Drown, yes.

FJG: ...Helene Drown. Could you tell us a little bit about Mrs. Drown?

GBK: Well, of course, she could tell you a lot more than I can. Helene has always been a very close and loyal friend of the family. Do you know her?

FJG: I've never met her.

GBK: Well, you'd be in for a treat if you did. I've not seen Helene. I know she'd been very ill a couple years ago with cancer but she's doing fine at the present time. My first encounter, and I'll call it "encounter" with Helene Drown was when I went to San Clemente with Mrs. Nixon in April [1971], before Tricia's wedding in June. I worked with Mrs. Nixon over at the house, but my living quarters were actually at the San Clemente Inn. I went over to the [residence] one day to take something to Mrs. Nixon, and Helene was there visiting. Connie and I were the only members of Mrs. Nixon's staff who accompanied her to San Clemente. Connie said that we were supposed to take Helene out to dinner. I'd met Helene earlier when she came to the office at San Clemente. The story was that Nixon ran like everything when Helene started coming and Connie said part of our job today is to keep Helene Drown out of Nixon's hair. Yet they'd gone to Europe together and traveled like that. So there was something going on that night that the Nixons did not, and particularly President Nixon, did not want Helene Drown at the house and yet she was there visiting the family. And they thought it would be a great idea if Connie Stuart and I took Helene Drown out to dinner and we

did. We took her out for dinner and she kept saying, "You know, Pat," she kept looking at her watch and say, "there's something I think that Pat wanted me to do." And we had a terrible time keeping, but she took us--I don't remember the name of the restaurant--but it turned out she treated us to dinner instead of us treating her to dinner. She probably could afford it a lot more than we could to begin with. Helene is sheer delight. I could see where President Nixon would find her a little disruptive to his thoughts and his actions, but on a social occasion I thought she was lots of fun.

I didn't meet her the first time when she came to visit in the White House, and it's a good thing I didn't. I had been working, I think two years had expired, and I was getting along fine with my correspondence with Mrs. Nixon. All of a sudden, one day I got letters back with changes in them, and they were poor changes. I called her [Mrs. Nixon] up, and she said, "Well, Helene didn't have anything to do, and she started fiddling with your mail." I didn't say anything. What are you going to say to the First Lady? There was a note, "Helene has been doing something, she's been working with the mail." Well, Helene Drown stayed there for about a week, and we just waited. I typed the letters and I held them, and that was one time the mail was late, because I didn't agree with the changes. Well, they did not go out that way, and Mrs. Nixon neither agreed nor disagreed, but she did not balk when we held them and sent them all back. Everyone breathed a great sigh of relief, because she [Mrs. Drown] did like to get involved. As a person, as someone to enjoy socially, she was quite delightful. But I didn't enjoy her meddling in the mail.

PAS: How would the private, the purely private correspondence be

handled?

GBK: We had a special card file of close personal friends. Tom McCoy had a copy on his desk and I had a copy on my desk. All the friends would just write "prior" on the mail, and we never opened a "prior" letter, anything that had "prior" on it, written in the handwriting or typed. We sent it up unopened, in a special folder. In the majority of cases, she would either pen an answer and then send it down for us to mail, or she would say, "Tell her so and so," or "Please draft a reply; you'll know what I want to say" from whatever the contents of the letter. There were very few letters that we did not eventually see, because once in a while she said, "I've kept this up here because I want the girls and RN to see this." But later on she would send it down, and we would file it. We never had any problem with so called purely personal mail, because we respected it the way she wanted us to. Once in a long while one might accidentally get slit, but then the staffer would come out and say, "Uh oh," and then I would tell Mrs. Nixon, "No one read this, it just got through the mechanical opener in a hurry, inadvertantly because we didn't catch the 'prior'".

PAS: How did the office change while you were director? What did you do that was different?

GBK: I think I'd written down something that I felt about that, but I can tell it without looking back on what I had said. I think the operation became a lot more efficient, and I think the office was a lot better organized. I checked with Tom McCoy recently and he said that the office ran smoothly and cleared more letters

and did more things in a more systematic and organized way than any other time, and he had been there since the Eisenhower administration, in the First Lady's correspondence.

I think that there was some respect created for the First Lady's correspondence, because, as I said before, I don't think the West Wing reckoned with the fact that Mrs. Nixon was going to get as involved and be as concerned about the correspondence as she was. That that was the thing she had been accustomed to doing. She had been on the Hill, and she said, "I used to volunteer in the office up there. It means," she kept saying, "it means so much to answer these letters, and we cannot be careless about it." So I think that, because she wanted it that way, the West Wing suddenly treated the correspondence with great respect. Certainly they were very much impressed with the messages that we wrote for the First Lady. They were substantive messages, they weren't flimsy things. I had three excellent writers on my staff, and we all worked together. We would work the drafts and we felt very proud of the messages that we sent out for her, because they weren't just saying, "Hope your convention is wonderful and I send my warm wishes." We did research to see what the organization did, and tried to do something that would be meaningful to the organization, and not just a bunch of words thrown together. We thought we succeeded; The fact that Mrs. Nixon was so insistent that we do something that was meaningful challenged us, and we tried to meet the challenge. I think it probably was a well run office. I think that's why the West Wing got curious about what was going on over

there, and how it was happening. I'm not complimenting myself; I just pulled a good staff together and was very fortunate in that respect. [I.] was also very fortunate to have hit upon her style of language, and the way she wanted to handle things and was a workaholic. I felt dedicated to her, and I was inspired and rewarded by that. Does that answer your question?

PAS: Has that changed in today's White House?

GBK: I am almost sure it has changed. I was back in the middle of the Carter administration and asked about the First Lady's correspondence. I found out it's in room 105, Executive Office Building. I think it's been tossed over there. I went over to meet the new director of correspondence in the Carter administration, and I was suddenly very ashamed of my former title, because I was met by a young girl who looked like she was about twenty-five or twenty-six. She was lounging on the couch and just dilly-dallied. She said, "Oh, that was a great job, wasn't it?" I think that most of the work was actually being done by Anne Higgins. Anne came in with the Nixon administration, but has survived, and did survive the Carter administration, and is still there now as a special assistant to President [Ronald W.] Reagan, in charge of Presidential correspondence, doing an excellent job. Anne came from the campaign group in New York, and she and I became very good friends. Mrs. [Rosalyn S.] Carter's letters were getting answered, but they certainly were not receiving the attention, or the concern that Pat Nixon's mail received. Apparently Mrs. Carter was not interested in mail except for extremely important

letters, such as Congressional letters or letters that demanded her attention. She did not have a First Lady's correspondence, as far as I was concerned, comparable to what we had for Mrs. Nixon. Certainly there was not the personal concern on Mrs. Carter's part as to how her mail was handled. Mrs. Nixon was even concerned with the routine letter and wanted to be sure they were answered.

PAS: She didn't use an autopen?

GBK: She did not use an autopen.

PAS: You mentioned that you had to answer mail directed from other staff, or you drafted....

GBK: Other staff...?

PAS: The other staff in the First Lady's office.

GBK: Many, many times. In fact I have a notebook of letters that I drafted--all the letters, practically all the letters except just a very few letters that Lucy Winchester sent out, and different types of letters. That was one of the things that I realized later really was not in my work, in my so-called job description. Lucy was a sweet person, and she came down and said, "I'm having trouble. Would you do these things?" And you know, these were the types of things I was accustomed to doing. So I had a notebook about this thick [approximately three inches] of letters I drafted for Connie Stuart's signature and a few for Helen Smith, letters for Lucy Winchester, and letters for my signature; those that the First Lady need not sign.

PAS: So you more or less...?

GBK: So I more or less handled almost all the correspondence. Now,

with one exception. Susan Porter did most of her work. I can't give anybody higher marks than I can give Susan Porter. I'm delighted that she has the job she has, and I'm glad she's enjoying it, because she was an excellent worker and she did not sluff any of her work off on anyone. What she did was done with great detail and proficiency and showed a lot of talent in writing.

PAS: Did you have any dealings with the Vice President, his wife, or the family or any of that? Did your office deal with that particular...?

GBK: You mean [Spiro T.] Agnew?

PAS: Agnew or [Gerald R.] Ford, when he came on.

GBK: Not with Ford.

PAS: They had their own staff, as far as...?

GBK: Yes, it probably still is true that the Vice President does have an office in the Executive Office Building, and an office up on the Hill. Is that still true?

FJG: Yes.

GBK: That was the way it was. I did have some dealings back and forth with correspondence.... Mrs. [Elinor I. ("Judy")] Agnew asked for guidance from our office about answering some letters. We helped her out in that, and I received a perfectly beautiful autographed photograph from the two of them. I did know one of the girls very well in the Vice President's office over in the Executive Office Building. She and I became very good telephone friends. That was the only contact I had with them. One of the girls told me that the memo that I wrote to Betty [Elizabeth B.]

Ford about what the First Lady's correspondence involved overwhelmed her. She said, "Well, we'll just have to keep her on." She did try. She came down to the office twice and I said "No," that I really felt like I should go. Then she had me up in the living quarters twice asking me to stay on. I told her that I didn't think I could survive another retread. That I had been retreaded three times already. Then I made the big mistake of saying that I wasn't going to do anything from here on out except volunteer work. That's how I got back there for two years of volunteer work for Betty Ford. She remembered my remark. Susan Porter was getting a little inundated with messages and correspondence and called, saying the First Lady needed a volunteer. Mrs. Ford didn't have the experience that Mrs. Nixon had with handling correspondence. She didn't have any conception of the scope and of the depth of it.

PAS: I have a couple of documents here that aren't representative of anything; they just happened to come across my desk. There's one here that, let me describe what it is, it is a memo from Roger Ailes, to Haldeman, May of '70, regarding White House television. I guess, Roger Ailes was a media person whom they employed to critique television. And it says that, "I think it important for the President to show a little more concern for Mrs. Nixon as he moves through a crowd. At one point he walked off in a different direction. Mrs. Nixon wasn't looking and had to run to catch up. From time to time he should talk to her and smile at her. Women voters are particularly sensitive to how a man treats his wife in public. The more attention she gets the happier they are." Do

you have any comment about that? Do you think it's true?

GBK: Yes. I think one of the most significant occasions was at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. I honestly think that Connie and Helen Smith could give you a better answer to that question, because they were out in public, and they were the press relations. I do know that Helen Smith was particularly sensitive to this particular issue.

A story came out, the day before Mrs. Nixon's first stroke, in Good Housekeeping magazine which was actually done by Helen McCain Smith. In that article Helen is quoted as being very critical of the President ignoring Mrs. Nixon at the Grand Ole Opry. That particular day was also the day that they'd gotten the news that he [Richard Nixon] had been disbarred; the New York Bar Association had disbarred him. Mrs. Nixon told me on the telephone, "I sent Fina [Sanchez] and Manolo out today for a copy of Good Houskeeping". Helen Smith was the dominant figure in the article. Mrs. Nixon mentioned it later and she said that the public statment that the President was ignoring her was much more hurtful than the oversights themselves. The First Lady is in the public light all over the world, and it does make a difference. Calling attention to it was probably, as she said, a lot more hurtful than the slight was itself. Helen could fill you in more about that because she experienced it more than I ever did. My knowledge of it was only what I read in the newspapers and saw on television, because I was not always there when the two of them were together at functions. But Helen or Connie would be there on most of the occasions. I must say that the few times that we

three have been together, he has been extremely considerate of her. I've pointed out how thoughtful he was of her. He's, as you say, a very complicated person. His unawareness, I don't think, is intended for any personal slight, because I know he's devoted to her. That's my view of it.

[END SIDE THREE]

[BEGIN SIDE FOUR]

PAS: I have another memo here, dated January 19, 1972, in which Charles Colson is telling the President, "The purpose of this memo is to urge that you encourage Mrs. Nixon to participate frequently in these kinds of highly visible public activities as the political year warms up. She is an enormous asset. She can do things you can't do; her moves will not be instantly labelled political, as yours would; she has the ability to project warmth and to create empathy. In an election year she can do the kind of human interest things that are so vital to us." And it concludes with the sentence, "The warmth of the First Family and the public affection for Mrs. Nixon, Julie and Tricia can be, if properly developed through the rest of the year, that 'something extra' that makes the critical difference." How did they use the First Family?

GBK: I think that many of the suggestions that came out in these memos from people over in the West Wing were the initial ideas of Connie Stuart, because that was one of the purposes of Connie being on the staff: to give that side of the family more visibility and to get them more involved. I know there have been occasions when some of the ideas have been Connie's. They would

take her memos and they would write another memo, because Connie did not write directly to the President. Or she may be talking with Charles [Stuart] about some idea that she had. I think that they did search through all the invitations for various appearances to see which might be the best, not only from a political standpoint, but from an overall standpoint for the First Family to be involved in. I think they responded real well. I know during the '72 campaign there was a lot of that going on, and I think it did pay off, because everyone became a lot more aware of Mrs. Nixon. I think one of the grandest pictures we have of her is where she has her arms outstretched in Miami at the convention. It was something that I remember very well, because I was there and I saw it. I thought it was great. They recognized the importance of presenting a solid front as a family, and as an involved family, because just being together is not important enough; you've got to be active in things.

The whole family participated except Ed Cox. He was busy with his law practice. David stayed out as much as he could. He would get in the family photos, but he didn't do an awful lot, because he was going to law school at that time. But when the whole family needed to get together, they responded. I can't remember all of the instances, but I know that there were a lot of public appearances before the campaign. I do think it contributed a lot to the great success of the election. It was a landslide, as I remember.

FJG: Do you think Mrs. Nixon enjoyed being the First Lady or would she

rather not have been the First Lady?

GBK: I think she enjoyed many aspects of being the First Lady. I think that it would have never occurred to her to have thought about not enjoying what was there to be done. She's the type of person that's always been so conscientious about every responsibility that she has ever assumed. If you've read Julie's book, you know Mrs. Nixon's life was not easy. She had the capacity of enjoying almost anything except where she felt that somebody was getting hurt, either emotionally or otherwise. I wish I could remember some of the occasions where she regretted very much that a certain incident had occurred, putting someone in a bad light. She was acutely sensitive to other people's feelings, and I think it was because of her own personal scars. She's a heck of a nice lady.

PAS: Does she enjoy the solitude of retired life now?

GBK: Well, I'll have to find that out better on Thursday. The last time I was in Saddle River she said to me, "I get to see the girls and the grandchildren often, but," she said, "in between, what do I do?" She's enjoying the grandchildren when she has an opportunity to see them. There are other things that she does, but I do think that the solitude sometimes gets a bit on the lonely side. My assessment, not hers.

FJG: Well, we have one more document here. Maybe you're not the person to comment on this; maybe Connie is the one we should ask. This one is from Colson to Van [DeVan L.] Shumway, June of '71, and it says, "In response to the attached, you have a problem. Anything you do with Connie Stuart is doomed from the outset.

You must always think in terms of how to do things without involving Connie but I must say that in this exercise, it is probably unavoidable." He suggests that he take it up with [Ronald L.] Ziegler. "Ron has been very skillfully negotiating with Connie (suspiciously so) and at this point I think he is our only possible hope for success."

GBK: Was that for one particular event, or was that an overall condemnation?

FJG: My guess is that it has something to do with the wedding, which is coming up in about two weeks.

GBK: Oh.

FJG: Some event that is coming up.

GBK: Oh.

FJG: It's June of '71, June 12, 1971.

GBK: Oh. That would have to do with the wedding, surely. Well, as a matter of fact, we always felt that the West Wing would have probably liked to ignore the East Wing, but we were there, and there wasn't much they could do about it. Then they realized they could use the East Wing. I should say, the West Wing felt about the East Wing that they were just a nuisance at times. Connie did a good job I think, and the way she did a good job was to be persistent and probably bugging people, like Colson. Her job was to do a good job for the First Lady, and she knew what the First Lady wanted. She always found out what the First Lady wanted before she went to the West Wing. What Colson wanted and what Mrs. Nixon wanted might have been entirely different matters. So, I don't put much weight on that sort of a memo. He

may have had a personal reason for disliking Connie, because she was gregarious and enthusiastic about what she did. I thought she did a good job.

FJG: Well, that's all I have on Mrs. Nixon.

PAS: Unless you have something to say.

GBK: That's fine with me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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with Gwendolyn B. King  
conducted by Frederick J. Graboske and Paul A. Schmidt  
at the Nixon Presidential Materials Project in Alexandria, Virginia  
on May 23, 1988

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