

Sanitized

Oral History Interview
With
GWENDOLYN B. KING
On
May 24, 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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Donor Genev King

Date Feb. 18, 1989



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DOCUMENT WITHDRAWAL RECORD [NIXON PROJECT]

DOCUMENT NUMBER	DOCUMENT TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE OR CORRESPONDENTS	DATE	RESTRICTION
1	Transc.	[Name withheld] Page 35	5/24/88	A
2	Transc.	p. 42, from last open, "...something that he called" to first open, "which is otherwise..."	5/24/88	D
3	Transc.	p. 42, from last open, "GBK:" to first open, "I am quite sure..."	5/24/88	D

FILE GROUP TITLE Nixon Project Oral Histories	BOX NUMBER ---
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FOLDER TITLE Oral History with Gwendolyn B. King, 5/24/88

RESTRICTION CODES

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| <p>A. Release would violate a Federal statute or Agency Policy.</p> <p>B. National security classified information.</p> <p>C. Pending or approved claim that release would violate an individual's rights.</p> <p>D. Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy or a libel of a living person.</p> | <p>E. Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information.</p> <p>F. Release would disclose investigatory information compiled for law enforcement purposes.</p> <p>G. Withdrawn and return private and personal material.</p> <p>H. Withdrawn and returned non-historical material.</p> |
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Oral history interview with Gwendolyn B. King
conducted by Paul A. Schmidt and Frederick J. Graboske
at the Nixon Project in Alexandria, Virginia
on May 24, 1988

PAS: If you'd like to tell us a little bit about the jewelry incident, Maxine Cheshire and all that.

GBK: Yes, I would like to clear the record on that. I remember so many times Mrs. Nixon saying how careful she wanted to be about seeing that things got over to the Gift Unit. She was expected to wear certain pieces of jewelry, and yet she felt very uneasy about it. I recall one incident very clearly, when I was upstairs in the living quarters with her. She took me in her closet and we both knelt down on our knees, and she pulled out a couple of cases of jewelry, and she said, "Lucy's [Ferguson] sick. I wanted to have these sent over to the Gift Unit," she said, "I just don't feel comfortable having them around here, and I'm certainly not going to wear them." She asked me if I would take them down and lock them up in my safe in the office, and be sure that Lucy Ferguson got them the very first thing on Monday morning.

I believe this incident occurred at a time when she was planning a trip and therefore would not be available to send them over to the Gift Unit. She entrusted them to me to put in my safe. Unfortunately, before I took them over to the EOB [Old Executive Office Building] Gift Unit, the article came out. I couldn't say anything, and yet I knew that it was not true: that she kept any of the jewelry, or even intended to keep any of the jewelry. She was always hesitant about wearing it. I know

she said from time to time, "We are told that we should use these things and yet I feel very uneasy about it. They're such beautiful things and, of course," (she would always use the words "and of course"), "all these things have to go to [the] State [Department]." I think this is where I got the impression that all the jewels went to State, and it's only now that I'm here that I realize that they go to the Archives. But somehow we always used the expression, "these have to go over to State". It was a very damaging article because no matter how much retraction a person gives, the damage is usually done. There's always that question. That's what made me very angry and also hurt her very much.

PAS: And then you turned them over on Monday?

GBK: Yes.

PAS: O.K. You had some other stories that you were going to tell that we didn't get to yesterday.

GBK: Yesterday we were talking about the fact that Mrs. Nixon worked very hard and set a very good example. But she also knew how to play and she had a wonderful sense of humor. One of the happy moments that I remember when we were there was when the President and Mrs. Nixon were giving a dinner for the Press Corps and the East Wing women were to provide the entertainment. Connie [Constance C.] Stuart was very good in dramatics. Connie composed a delightfully funny script with all of us playing the characters of various newswomen. Maxine Cheshire and other people included. I was Helen Thomas. We "performed" in the East Room and "entertained" the Press Corps. We got a lot of laughs

but we were very amateurish. The next morning Mrs. Nixon sent down a box of candy with a nice little note saying, "Congratulations to the East Wing Players for their first and I hope last performance" [laughter]. She did many little things like that to give us a laugh during the day. It was always Mrs. Nixon cheering us up instead of us cheering her up when things were down. She had a tremendous sense of humor. She was vivacious and a great person to be around.

PAS: Hm hmm.

FJG: I can't help but notice the necklace you're wearing today, of the White House.

GBK: Oh!

FJG: Can you tell us what's behind that?

GBK: Well, I don't wear this very often, but it just happens it goes with this particular outfit. This is one of only four in the world. There are many White House charms, but this particular one was one Tom [Thomas E.] Stephens had Galt [and Brothers, Inc.] design. He gave one to each of the four ladies in the Appointments Office: Helen Donaldson (she was Helen Colle at that time), Mary Rawlins, and Barbara Johnston, and me. It's engraved on the back. He gave them as farewell gifts to us when he left the White House.

PAS: What administration was that?

GBK: That was the end of the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower administration. Tom Stephens was President Eisenhower's Appointments Secretary. (Bern [Bernard M.] Shanley was the Appointments Secretary when I first went into the Appointments Office.) When he left, Tom

Stephens came in as Appointments Secretary. There was an interim period when a man who's probably in Washington now, by the name of Bob [Robert K.] Gray, who filled in for a brief time. That was quite a time with us because he certainly had the worst case of White House-itis of any person that I have ever worked with or worked for. Before he picked up a call for himself on the telephone, he'd say, "Now, you break in on the intercom and announce that the President's calling." As far as I know I don't think the President ever did call him directly [laughter].

FJG: Yeah, I believe he's a friend of Rose [Mary] Woods

PAS: Yeah.

GBK: Yes, could be.

FJG: Why don't you tell us a little bit about your experiences in the Eisenhower administration, starting at the beginning?

GBK: One thing I remember most about the Eisenhower administration is the fact that it was run with such military-like precision. It was the one administration that had more or less regular hours. President Eisenhower was at his desk almost every morning by ten minutes of eight. He would leave about ten after six, or twelve after six. I logged him in and out as a rule, and kept a record of all of his appointments.

Of course many times we would stay quite late if we were preparing for a trip, particularly an overseas trip. I was "the trip girl" and worked very closely with the Department of State, White House staff, and with the Secret Service on all of his trips. It gave me a fabulous opportunity to be on the advance team that went around the world to advance his trip in April

1960. But I don't think you want to hear any details of what I did, do you?

FJG: Yes, we do.

GBK: It was an interesting experience for me because I'd never even been outside of the United States. We used Air Force One as a trial run piloted by the President's pilot, Colonel [William] Draper, Bill Draper. First we went to Denmark, landing in Copenhagen, and had the facinating experience of being met by the Russian pilots. The Russians would not allow Colonel Draper to fly into Russian territory. They piloted the President's plane to Moscow. It was an eerie feeling for all of us. There were forty-three people on the team and I was the only woman.

Prior to the trip, a friend who spoke Russian tried to teach me some useful Russian phrases. When I went to the Foreign Office in Moscow, one of the interpreters came to me and she said, "Mrs. King, you spoke Russian so perfectly," when I asked to go to the ladies room [laughter]. She said, "But you have a southern accent." I said, "What would you know about a southern accent because you told me you had never been outside Russia?" She spoke with a British accent.

The Russian pilots joined us in Denmark and flew us in Air Force One, to Moscow. We all stayed at the Ukraine Hotel and worked at the embassy all day. We were there for eight days. It was a very interesting experience. It would take too long to give all the details about my experience in the Soviet Union--of being followed by a woman KGB agent, and my turning around and saying, "Oh, hello, I'm so happy to see you. My name is Gwen."

The next day I had a different KGB agent. She followed me up to my hotel floor, and they'd stop at the desk. She was everywhere I was. When I went through the Kremlin one morning she was there, and so finally, at the ballet, I just turned around and stopped and said, "So nice to see you again." She looked very startled, so the next day I had a blond agent instead of a brunette.

We made the trip to Russia but the President did not get to make the trip because of Colonel [Francis G.] Powers's flight over Russian territory. That's the only time, I think, that President Eisenhower really showed his vulnerability. He actually wondered at that time if he should resign. (There were times in most of the Presidents' administrations when each one showed their vulnerability. Like President [John F.] Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs, marching around and around the office, saying, "How could I have been so stupid?". It gives a human touch to the Presidency to think they're not totally infallible.) We went to Russia and then we flew to Iceland and then stayed some time in Alaska. Then flew from Alaska to Japan and [from] Japan went into Korea. I helicoptered all over Korea. There were so many incidents that happened along the way that I wouldn't want to take your time telling you about them.

We worked very hard when we were at the embassy in Japan because Douglas MacArthur [II] was the ambassador there and he was a workaholic. So I was glad that I was young enough to not require much sleep because I would not have seen any of Tokyo. Some of us only got about two hour's sleep a night. We toured

Tokyo at night. We worked hard at the embassy in Japan because President Eisenhower wanted very much for the trip there to be successful. Unfortunately the riots broke out--they were not obvious when we were there--but when the presidential party went in June, there was much rioting with students trying to topple the cars in the presidential motorcade. It did not get too dangerous but it was a bit unsettling.

PAS: So the President did some of the trip, he just didn't go to Moscow?

GBK: Right. He substituted Thailand for Moscow. It was called the President's Around the World Trip. Actually we did not stop in many ports, but we almost made a complete circle of the globe.

FJG: How do you know that President Eisenhower considered resigning at that point?

GBK: I really don't know. I just know that that is my clear impression, that he wondered out loud.

Some other incidences? General Eisenhower, in December of 1947, offered to babysit for my two little children, and he didn't show up [laughter]. What happened was that Bob [Robert L.] and Dottie [Dorothy] Schulz, who were our neighbors and friends invited the Eisenhowers and Bruce [LaBruce] and me, over for a very small cocktail party. Barbara [Eisenhower] did not come because she was expecting David [Eisenhower]. We were chatting and General Eisenhower asked how many children we had. I explained, and then I went to the window and pointed across to where I lived, and then somebody said, "What are you going to do on New Year's Eve?" I said, "We do have some invitations, but

we don't think we'll be going out because we haven't been here too long and we haven't established a babysitter." The General turned to me and he said, "How old are they?" I told him how old they were, I think Meg was eighteen months and Johnny was two and a half. He said, "I'll be glad to babysit for you" I said, "Oh, you will?" He said, "Sure, I might as well get in training" [laughter]. So, everyone went on talking about other things, and it wasn't referred to again. John [Eisenhower] was there, and Mrs. [Mamie] Eisenhower and the General.

They left, and then Bob thought he'd have some fun with them. They were at a party on New Year's Eve at Fort Myer. Bob went up to him and said, "General, don't you think you've forgotten something?" You know that way he [Eisenhower] had of talking, "W-w-well now what was it, what was it?" He said, "You did promise to babysit for Mrs. King tonight." He said, "Oh, do you think she was really expecting me? Do you think I should call her?" [Laughter] Then everybody burst out laughing. They said, "No, she found a babysitter, but we just thought we'd have a little fun with [you]."

President Eisenhower was formally polite to all the women on the staff. He never called any of us by name. He seemed to be rather shy around most of the women, except for Ann Whitman. I many times substituted when Ann had to run out to go to the beauty parlor because of some function, and she would ask if I would hold down her office. There were a couple of occasions when the President was still in the office. He did call me in to ask me something or to tell me something. I remember the first

time I went in, I thought, "My heavens, I'd freeze to death in here," because he always kept his office oh, so cold! He asked me to do a few simple little things, I can't remember what. Then I decided I would remind him and I said, "Mr. President, you're not offering to do any more babysitting are you?" He looked at me for a long time, and then all of a sudden he said, "Are you that mother?" [Laughter] He'd been looking at me and could not place where we had met previously.

We sometimes thought that President Eisenhower didn't have the best of memories because he would always call Ann by name and he called most of his staff members by name, but he never called any of the women by their name. Once, in the [Lyndon B.] Johnson administration, when he came back to confer with President Johnson on the Vietnam crisis, I happened to be coming from the East Wing to the West Wing. He'd just gotten off the elevator and we met. I smiled and nodded. All of a sudden he turned around and he said, "Mrs. King, are you still here?" So he did know who I was [laughter]. I guess he thought I just forgot to leave when he left.

He did run the White House with great dignity and formality. From time to time I would work in the Appointments Office and then we would have reliefs because there were only two desks for the girls in the office. I would go sometimes and sit in the outer desk in General [Wilton B.] Person's office. I was assigned to the Appointments Office but alternated with the others in exchanging locations so we could work on correspondence.

I thought it was a good administration. People will ask me, "Well, wasn't it a sort of a dull administration by comparison with other administrations?" But, I often think that maybe that sense of dullness lulled us into a sense of security. Because it was a secure time. We don't sense that anymore. I always say that people might say that President Eisenhower wasn't the strongest of Presidents and that he only inherited the New Deals and the Fair Deals and carried those on, but I think differently. I think he did have some good programs. He did have a balanced budget. He insisted upon it.

He emphasized the necessity of our having adequate military strength but cautioned against the overspending for defense because it would be a threat to our way of life. He gave President Kennedy some good advice. I think I had mentioned already what President Eisenhower, in his last address, the thing that impressed me most, when he said that, "America is, today, the strongest, the most influential and the most productive nation in all the world." I think that gives a lot of us pause these days now. I think President Eisenhower did have a strong administration. Certainly he balanced the budget and was successful in easing the strains of the so-called "Cold War" at that time. I think he deserved credit for that. He also said to President Kennedy when he left, "No easy matters will come to you from this office." He threw out a big challenge when he said, "America is, today, the strongest, the most influential, and the most productive nation."

PAS: What about Mrs. Eisenhower?

GBK: I knew her, but not well, because she had little rapport with the working staff. Her protected background made it difficult for her to relate to people who worked. But, I think that her enjoyment of her role as First Lady certainly did endear her to the press and to the public alike. She thoroughly enjoyed her role as First Lady, I believe. She loved the entertaining of guests, especially Heads of State.

In my opinion, alcoholic she was not. She had a type of vertigo that my husband had a number of years ago. I can be very sympathetic with someone who could lose their balance. I think the loss of balance was caused by vertigo and not alcohol. She never took exercise, and she had no muscle at all. That, combined with the type of vertigo she had, the inner ear problem, would contribute to her maybe stumbling at times, and caused people to say that she was an alcoholic. I'm told she enjoyed a drink before dinner. So, I believe the criticism was not warranted.

Mrs. Eisenhower flabbergasted me when she said that in thirty-seven years she had unpacked her household twenty-seven times. That would have undone me. I believe she was a good mother because I knew her son, John, and he certainly confirmed that she had been a good mother. Ike was certainly her life, and when he died the spark went out of Mamie. I saw her only once after he died, and the sparkle was gone. Julie [(Nixon) Eisenhower], of course, talked a lot about her, and how it had affected her. She was never the same.

FJG: Did you have any contacts with Sherman Adams?

GBK: Lots. Sherman Adams was one of my heroes. I admired him tremendously because he was one of the most dedicated public servants I've known before or since. Certainly it was Sherman Adams who held things together smoothly when President Eisenhower was so ill on two occasions. It's true he was taciturn and maybe abrupt, to the point of rudeness at times, but I think that he had a job to do, and this was his manner. Once, I remember, he chuckled and said, "I don't intimidate you, do I?" I made the mistake of saying, "No, Governor Adams, you don't. You remind me so much of my father." He started laughing. My father was a very taciturn, quiet person, and yet I knew he was the gentlest, kindest person in the world.

Governor Adams and I had a special rapport. I would always try to get in the office in the mornings before he did, which was before eight o'clock, incidentally. I'd often meet him at the west gate, going into the entrance at the lower gate, and, of course, I would naturally drop back and let him go in, because he was approaching it with a driver. I would hop out of the car and dash upstairs as fast as I could go to try to get to the office first. I would be whistling the tune that we'd both heard on each other's radio. He would meet me at the top of the elevator and say, "Mrs. King, ladies do not whistle." But there was always a twinkle in his eye. He gave me a couple of beautiful records, including a recording of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

I thought that his being dismissed, or invited to leave the government because of the vicuna coat and the oriental rug, paled in significance compared with the things that I saw happen in

other administrations that I thought were of greater magnitude. He died October, a year ago, and I remember it well, as I've already told this story to Paul. My husband and I were in Tokyo. We had just taken a cruise on the Pearl and had visited China. We were waiting at the Tokyo airport to fly back and I picked up a newspaper and there was a news item saying that Sherman Adams had died. I felt that I had lost a good friend. Although we didn't keep in close contact, I have several treasured letters he wrote to me from time to time afterwards. One of them was after Helen Thomas's article circulated throughout the country about my work with Mrs. Nixon's correspondence. He wrote me a delightful note saying, "Dear Gwen, what in the hell are you still doing in that ant hole? Regards, Sherm." [Laughter] I liked him, I admired him and I respected him. That's my summary of Governor Adams. I regretted very much seeing him go.

FJG: Did you have any contacts with Bernard Goldfine?

GBK: Yes and no. I met him in the office on a couple of occasions. When I first went to the White House, my husband said to me, "There's one thing you must remember. In working at the White House, it's your job and not you that's important." He had been around Washington a little longer than I had. He said, "I think that it carries with it the obligation of an uncompromising integrity. If you fail in that test, then you ought to get out." I guess that's one of the reasons I stayed on. Mr. Goldfine was very generous, and I do know that some of my fellow workers did accept a gift, and later had to testify on the Hill. But thank God my husband was adamant. I didn't forget it because he

wouldn't let me forget it [laughter].

FJG: Did you ever have any contact with Jim [James C.] Hagerty?

GBK: Oh, yes! Jim was one of my favorite people because Jim was on the advance around the world trip in April 1960. See, Tom Stephens and Jim Hagerty were the key people. My job was to work with the Secret Service and with Tom Stephens and Jim Hagerty on the President's scheduling. Jim was on that trip and he and I were very good friends.

He was responsible for introducing me to ballet. I'd always thought that I didn't particularly like ballet. Jim had tickets to the Bolshoi Ballet while we were in Moscow. I had two evenings at the Bolshoi Ballet with Jim Hagerty. I sat there with my mouth open, I could not believe how wonderful they were. It's an experience I never forgot. So, I knew Jim real well.

FJG: When you were on the trip, would Tom Stephens and Jim Hagerty then be negotiating with the host government, with the Soviets...

GBK: Yes.

FJG: ...on exactly what would happen?

GBK: Yes.

FJG: Then they would tell you and you would prepare that portion of the President's itinerary...

GBK: Yes.

FJG: ...at that time?

GBK: I had my own typewriter with me and did a tremendous amount of typing on that trip. I had quite an experience in Moscow. We were supposed to go to the Foreign Office for a meeting. Tom Stephens had gone to the Foreign Office a little earlier and he

said, "If you don't get me at the embassy come directly to the Foreign Office." I went to the Foreign Office with Colonel John McNally, who was our Signal Corps chief. He was the communications man, who set up the telephone systems, the communications systems. Wherever we would go our phones would be connected to all the phones in the press office, in hotels, embassies.

We went to the Foreign Office to meet with them, but unfortunately, they had already gone up to the twelfth floor. I got the ninth degree trying to join my boss. Finally a woman by the name of Mrs. Alexander, (she's the one who later said I spoke Russian with a southern accent) came to me and I insisted that I had to be in a meeting. When I was ushered into the meeting, Tom said, "Thank God you made it." I was sitting there and there was some talking back and forth. Finally Ambassador [Llewellyn] Thompson turned to Tom Stephens and said, "The Russians do not want the lady in the meeting." [Laughter] Tom was a very insistent person and said, "Well, she stays, I stay." But Jim Hagerty said, "Maybe we ought to agree." He was trying to smooth things over. Tom was really burned up about it. But I left the meeting.

I sat in the outer office working on some of my notes or twiddling my thumbs. Two Russian girls were at their desks talking. Once in a while I thought I'd catch "King". Finally, I sat so long that I turned to them and said, "[speaks Russian]." It was as though I had thrown a bomb on the desk, everything stopped. All I'd asked was, "Where's the ladies room?" They

didn't even answer me, so I repeated it, because I thought, "Well!" [Laughter] They still didn't say anything, but got on the phone, and called for Mrs. Alexander, the same person who had finally escorted me up there. Mrs. Alexander escorted me to the ladies room. Enroute she said to me, "Mrs. King, I didn't know you spoke Russian. Your dossier does not say that you speak Russian." I said, "Oh, I don't speak Russian! I have twelve phrases." I showed her my list in phonetics to prove it. I don't think she believed me but she escorted me to the restroom.

PAS: They were worried, I guess, that you had understood what they were saying?

GBK: Yes. Ambassador Thompson told me later that I had accomplished quite a feat because people just do not get up to the twelfth floor of the Foreign Office easily. But I said, "Well, I talked very fast." Tom said, "Did you cry a lot?" I said, "No, I didn't cry a lot." [Laughter] There were other experiences, such as my bag being broken into.

FJG: Did you ever meet Mr. Nixon when he was Vice President?

GBK: Yes. When you say "meet him," he was in and out of Governor Adams's office from time to time, and I met him on those occasions. Sometimes I would be in General Persons's office and sometimes see him there. It wasn't until afterwards, when I was visiting down in San Clemente, that I got to know him better. He's a hard person to really know. He was always very courteous, considerate, and pleasant.

PAS: When was the first time you met Mrs. Nixon? If you can remember.

GBK: She and Vice President Nixon came into the office one time. I

don't remember what the occasion was. I didn't formally meet her on that occasion, I saw her, let's put it that way. I met Mrs. Nixon two or three days after I started working. She came down to my office. That first time she was not as warm as I found her to be later.

Certainly I got to know her better by the end of the six weeks, because Mrs. Nixon personally asked me if I would stay on as her Director of Correspondence. She said, "You seem to know what I'm thinking when you write." At that time I was taking a lot of work home, and getting about four hour's sleep a night. Fortunately I required little sleep. I would work many nights until two o'clock. That was the only way I could catch up in the time I had estimated for the task. I was doing all the messages at that point, I think we generated more work. Finally, I hired three young women who were good writers, who drafted letters and messages. I would edit them, but some were almost letter perfect after they became familiar with Mrs. Nixon's style of writing.

FJG: O.K.

[END SIDE ONE]

[BEGIN SIDE TWO]

PAS: There was one question that we didn't cover yesterday, having to do with research that your office would do for letters that would come in that you may or may not have expertise in. What would happen then?

GBK: We had a very good contact with most of the agencies, such as HEW, it was at that time, Health, Education and Welfare. We also had some good contact with NIH [National Institutes of Health].

Many times we felt it would be better for us to respond to the letter and to tell them that we [were] referring it to the agency, but many times we felt that we would rather have the agency let us reply to the letter and get some information. We liked to have, instead of sending things to refer and expect them to bring them back to us, telephone contacts rather than wait for papers to be moved back and forth. We know, for a fact, that we did a lot of good in many instances because letters would come back. I remember there were several children who really were put into the NIH programs because Mrs. Nixon's letters intervened, through the work that we had done in our office. Then the grateful letters that we received from the parents sometimes were very moving.

Here is a letter that serves as an example. We did not tell the mother that we were going to be successful in getting medical help for her ailing child. I wrote a letter, telling her that we were referring her letter to NIH and were contacting the American Heart Association. But we did more than that. We got on the telephone and gave them the name and address of the writer and emphasized the urgency. The letter was dated November the twenty-second, and we didn't hear anymore. On February the fourth we received a letter from the parents of the child [which] said that, "Some weeks after your letter was received we were advised to take Isabel [sp?] to Jackson Memorial Hospital for the operation she needed very badly. The operation was performed and it was successful and Isabel is now at home, well and healthy. The doctors and nurses cared for her in a splendid manner and we

thank God for the so many things we have to be grateful for. It may have been only a coincidence that shortly after your letter was received, the problem was resolved in such an easy and a smooth succession of events. But we want to think that there was more to it than that, and we are certain now that the generous hand of the First Lady, responding to our plea, is what made it all possible." We recieved many letters like that. It made our work worthwhile.

Of course, the more letters we would get like that the more the staff would be more interested in getting on the phone and getting help for the person. I won't go into the details because the article that I gave you tells of another incident about a little girl that was beaten up because she had taken her Christmas money to buy a present for a black child. She was knocked off of her bicycle and beaten as a "nigger lover," as the quote says. Mrs. Nixon personally sent her a letter of commendation for what she did and it got in the newspapers down in her area. It woke people up a little bit. So, we felt that we weren't just handling correspondence, we felt, on many occasions, that we were rendering an invaluable service. We did use the First Lady that way, and we thought it was a good way to use her.

You asked about the private Mrs. Nixon and the public Mrs. Nixon. Mrs. Nixon was always, of course, more at ease in small groups, where she knew the people. I think that her shyness was more reserve than anything else. I think that she had an innate sense of dignity which never seemed to falter throughout her

life. If she seemed too reserved, it probably was because she wanted very much to "be the First Lady," in the ideal of First Lady. I was impressed by Henry Kissinger's wonderful tribute to Pat Nixon in his first book [White House Years]. One sentence reads, "And if she seemed remote, who of you could possibly know the fires that she had to bank in her stern existence. She made no claims on anyone." And she didn't, she bore all her problems in solitude. She didn't flinch and she didn't complain.

That was the Pat Nixon that we saw, warm and friendly and lots of fun. I know that there wasn't a single member of the staff (except perhaps a couple of members of the staff, that had to be asked to leave for various reasons) that not only admired and respected her, but also loved her. And felt that she was well worth working hard and long hours for.

She was also too kind-hearted to personally let anybody go. I remember the sad time we had when Penny [Penelope A.] Adams was supposed to leave and didn't. She kept the desk there, but she took a long time after Connie [Constance C. Stuart] left to get a job elsewhere. I had the sad job of "firing" Penny. I think it was one of the toughest things I ever did because Penny was my very close friend. With Connie gone, her job no longer existed, and Mrs. Nixon realized that she was still drawing a salary, and felt very conscience stricken about the fact that someone was on the payroll but not working. Mrs. Nixon kept trying to call Penny to tell her, "You must go." Finally she said, "Gwen you'll just have to do it for me." And I did, old meanie [laughter].

FJG: Well, to get back to the Eisenhower administration, for just a minute, you worked in the Appointments Office there and, of course in the Kennedy administration, the Johnson administration. Could you give us some idea of how the work was conducted and how that changed over time?

GBK: During the Eisenhower administration, things ran with military-like precision. You did your work on time. When the Kennedys came in things were, to put it mildly, a little less organized, particularly in the early days. I know it was quite a shock to me because I was accustomed to arriving at the office at twenty minutes of eight, because President Eisenhower arrived about ten minutes of eight. Many mornings in the early Kennedy days, I'd be at my desk by myself at twenty minutes of ten. Unfortunately, evenings I might still be at my desk at twenty of ten, or twenty after ten in the evening. This made it very rough on my home life. I kept thinking to myself, "If they'd just settle down and come to work on time in the mornings we could get some things done." They were accustomed to different hours on the Hill. Most of the staff that came in with the Kennedy administration kept late hours. They worked all hours up on Capitol Hill and that was just the routine that they were accustomed to. But things did settle down in time, and we did get on a more normal schedule.

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Office procedures were not carried out with as much efficient precision as in the Eisenhower years. Things got accomplished, it is quite true. We found that [Evelyn P.] Lincoln, who came in as the President's secretary, did not seem to be as capable or competent as her position would indicate. I was shocked at the book she wrote about Kennedy. I think she also said something about the widely publicized weather report. I was responsible for that weather report incident and I told her what had happened. She included it in her book as something that she had done, I think. I know that in the [William] Manchester book [Death of a President] the story about the weather report was distorted.

FJG: Why don't you tell us now about the weather report.

GBK: President Kennedy was planning the trip to Texas. He had been persuaded by Vice President Johnson to go. The Texas conservatives and the Texas liberals were feuding. Vice President Johnson hoped that President Kennedy could go down

there and help unify the Democrats in Texas. President Kennedy didn't want to go but finally relented for political expediencies. On the night before he left I was working quite late because Ken [P. Kenneth] O'Donnell had some last minute details of things to do. A young man from the Military Aide's Office came over between nine and ten o'clock and gave me a weather report for the President. I put it on the President's desk. It said that the weather in Texas was going to be cloudy and cool, which meant that the Secret Service would probably be using the protective bubble on the President's limousine.

The next morning the weather report was quite different. Texas was going to be sunny. Mrs. [Jacqueline B.] Kennedy was very upset because she had packed her clothes according to the earlier weather report, and her luggage had already gone out to Andrews Air Force Base. She heard the news and telephoned the President. He took the call standing at my desk, and that's why I know what happened. He looked up and said to Ken, "Who gave me that weather report last night?" Ken said, "Gwen did". Of course, the President knew that I didn't make up the weather report. He said, "Get me the responsible person in the Military Aide's Office." That young aide told me later that he certainly was proud to have the distinction of having received the last telephone call that President Kennedy made, even if it was to bawl him out for not staying up all night and watching for winds over the Gulf of Mexico. So, that was my story about the weather report.

Although I admired President Johnson's zeal in carrying out

his programs, as a person I found him an extremely difficult person to work with, and got the brunt of his wrath on one occasion. He bawled me out one morning because the calendar was much too heavy. He knew that I was not responsible for the President's schedule. I just prepared it and put it on the desk [laughter] and notified people of the meetings. But, Jack Valenti, who had a desk in the Appointments Office, and Bill Moyers, who was using Ken O'Donnell's desk, conveniently walked out of the office when the buzzer went off signaling that the President was enroute to the office [laughter]. The President approved the calendar the night before, but it was late and he didn't absorb it.

But he came in very angry. He was talking very loud, "You don't expect me to see the Future Farmers of America when I've got more important things to do?" I just kept looking up at him because what else do you do when the President bawls you out. I hadn't had that experience before. So, I don't think I even batted an eye, and finally he said, "Girl, don't you hear what I'm saying to you?" [laughter] Well, it came out in that article that Helen Thomas did of me during the Nixon administration, and I was very upset about it. She quoted that I said to the President, "Everybody else down the hall does, Mr. President." I did not say that. What I said to Helen Thomas was, "Everybody else down the hall heard what he was saying because poor little Lorraine Baird came in just shaking afterwards. She said, "He certainly did bawl you out."

I am sorry it got in the paper because I think that is

probably the reason that I did not get invited to the Johnson [Library] dedication because that story had circulated throughout the country. I would not have been presumptuous enough to have ever said to President Johnson, "Everybody down the hall does, Mr. President." But Helen either misunderstood me or she added this slant to it. Although I like and respect Helen very much, I regretted the misquote which put me in a bad light.

I also remember that one of the things about a book written about President Johnson, I don't recall who the author was, but he said, "President Johnson elected not to use the Oval Office when he came into office, but chose rather to continue using his office over in the Executive Office Building in order to give Mrs. Kennedy..." and so on. Well, that's not the way it happened at all! President Johnson was intending to use the Oval Office. (I had cleared the desk the night before, and had cataloged the things that President Kennedy had left in it, including the comb with a couple of his hairs in it, and put them in an envelope and said what desk everything came from. The official papers had already been put in the safe. [I] had done that before President Johnson came in, around midnight that night of the assassination.) He came to the Oval Office next morning, then came out into my office and told me to call the National Security Council members for a meeting. I was taking down what he wanted me to add to his calendar. He was standing there with Bill Moyers and Jack Valenti when the Oval Office door opened. It was Robert Kennedy who had come from the mansion, through the Oval Office and into the Appointments Office. He looked awful and

there was a very brief exchange. Then Robert Kennedy stated his mission, he said that Mrs. Kennedy had asked that the Oval Office not be used until she could come over and pack the personal items of President Kennedy. She did come in later and I helped her box things and carried them up to the mansion. William Manchester made it look as though President Johnson had made the choice not to use the Oval Office. I believe he was planning to use the Oval Office. He had been in there. It was two or three weeks before he actually moved back into the Oval Office from his V.P. office in the EOB.

FJG: Can you tell us a little bit about Mrs. Kennedy?

GBK: The first time I met Jacqueline Kennedy was during the Eisenhower administration, when she came in as a roving photographer, I believe she was, or reporter, a roving reporter/roving photographer of the [Washington] Times Herald. I remember the occasion very well because I had some nice little duties once in awhile, such as escorting people into the President's office, or meeting them in the lobby, or the Fish Room, (the conference room across the hall). On this occasion Perry Como and Kim Novak were in the lobby waiting to see President Eisenhower. I met Jacqueline Bouvier that day in the lobby because she wanted to photograph Perry Como and Kim Novak. I didn't actually meet her, that's the first time I'd been with her.

She changed dramatically from that vision that I had of [her] there, to the First Lady. I had very little contact with Mrs. Kennedy. I did have one contact--she called over to the office one day upset because she had received a very valuable

historical document dating back to the eighteenth century. She had left it in the conference room because she had received it there. When she got over to the mansion and realized she did not have it, she called the office and I volunteered to go to the conference room and search for it. Before she got back to the conference room I had found it far back in a little cubbyhole. It had been put in there by one of the ushers, not realizing what it was, and the document slid to the back. She was so grateful, you would have thought that I was her best friend the way she was graciously thanking me. The next day I passed her in the hall and she looked right through me. That was Jacqueline Kennedy.

I know that Jacqueline Kennedy has been criticized and admired and had more publicity, probably, than any First Lady, but I have one recollection of her that I remember that gives, I think, a different picture other than "jet setter". She said once, to a group of news women when asked how she defined her role as a First Lady, "I define my role as first of all, taking care of the President." She added, "And I think if you bungle the raising of your children, whatever else you might do well doesn't matter very much." That hit me in the pit of the stomach because our only son had run away from home the week before. We had learned where he was and he was O.K., but I was still wounded from the blow. I do think that Mrs. Kennedy has been successful in being a very good mother, under very difficult circumstances. She apparently had very good friends among her staff, and some not very good friends. I don't think that she would have been a very easy person to work for. I had very few occasions to run

into her, so that's about all the comment that I could make about Mrs. Kennedy. Mrs. [Lady Bird] Johnson was neat [laughter].

FJG: Tell us about Mrs. Johnson.

GBK: Well, Mrs. Johnson endeared herself to me. One Saturday after the Johnsons were at the White House, I worked on the speech that Mrs. Johnson was going to give the following Tuesday, on Appalachia, at the University of West Virginia. She was helping the President with his "War on Poverty". I stayed until about six-thirty in the afternoon and then went home. On Monday morning the operator called and said, "Gwen, Mrs. Johnson is on the line." I just hadn't really gotten accustomed to the name yet. I said, "Which Mrs. Johnson?" She said, "Gwen, it's the First Lady!" It surprised me very much because I had never met her. She thanked me for sacrificing my Saturday afternoon to work on her speech. That was funny because I didn't have a Saturday afternoon off. We worked Saturdays, unless you were on vacation. She has been given so much credit for her beautification program, but it is a pity that nobody ever mentions the wonderful thing she did with the Head Start program, which is still very thriving in so many areas. I know she received an award recently, and not one article, at least of those that reached us in California, mentioned the Head Start program. Although the flowers are beautiful and everybody will bless her for it, I think that the seeds that she's planted in young children's minds to get them started, is far more valuable than all the flowers we view, maybe. Several times she invited the women in the West Wing to the upstairs living quarters for

tea and cookies, and to see if Lyndon were giving us a hard time [laughter]. And he usually was! [laughter] I always liked her and that's why I felt so bad about the article that Helen Thomas did.

President Johnson kept having my FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] [full field investigation] run over and over again.

FJG: Why was that, do you think?

GBK: I was from the Eisenhower administration, and then I was a Kennedy administration [employee], and here I am now, with his administration. I think he felt an obligation to keep as many of the Kennedy administration people as he could, hoping they would leave of their own accord--not wanting to stir up things so soon after the assassination. The fact that I had worked in the Eisenhower administration also, made me even more suspect. Orren Bartlett, White House FBI liaison, came to me one day and said, "Gwen, can't you just give us something that might be a little interesting, or a little "off" that he can read? When he sees that dull, clean report of yours, he keeps saying, 'Well, there must be something. Run it again!'" [laughter]

FJG: You said yesterday that you wanted to leave and he wouldn't let you.

GBK: That's a sad story. Bill [William J.] Hartigan had been working at the White House in the Kennedy administration and had gone from the White House to the Post Office Department. He knew me and he knew that I was thinking about leaving. He asked me if I would be interested in a job at the Post Office in the

international division, with opportunities for some overseas travel connected with the work. It sounded very exciting and I thought the change advisable. President Johnson got word of my plans. Jack Valenti told me, "The President says that you can go if you must, but not to any other position in government." I had no alternative but to stay. I was a Civil Service career employee, not a political appointee. I had already invested the years in the Library of Congress. I felt it would be a great loss, so I stuck it out.

It worked out all right because just shortly before the end of the Johnson administration I did move down to the office of Horace Busby and worked with him for a couple of months. President Johnson wanted very much to push through his programs. He wanted to have more Cabinet meetings. "Buzz" not only was the secretary of the Cabinet, but he was also an excellent speechwriter as well. I got good training on the job from Busby.

PAS: Was that characteristic of Johnson, that kind of an attitude, of blacklisting, blackballing you? If you didn't work for him you weren't going to work for anybody that he didn't want you to?

GBK: Yes. I know the story about what happened to Bill Moyers's brother, James, whom I worked for. I went to the EOB for a special assignment with Bill Moyers's brother, at Bill Moyers's request, because Bill also knew about my efforts to take a job at the Post Office. (He also knew my feeling of being uncomfortable around President Johnson. I think that Bill also appreciated the fact that I found some of his [Johnson's] personal characteristics a little offensive. Like going to the bathroom

off the hall and not bothering to close the door. When it happened I would just get up and leave the office.)

Bill Moyers asked me, when I was working in Busby's office, if I would take this assignment with his brother, James. James had been Vice President of the Freeport Sulpher Company in New Orleans and the President knew him. James and Bill had grown up in Marshall, Texas, and the President knew them. He had invited James to come on the White House staff and James had declined several times. James had had an operation for [an] ulcer and was often in pain. He had a serious health problem. He was "relieved of" his job at the Freeport Sulpher Company and "forced" to take this assignment at the White House.

James and I worked on the project of reorganizing the President's correspondence. We spent several weeks on the project, and we were going to present our report to the President on a Monday morning. We had just about wrapped it up on a Friday evening and were planning to work a half day on Saturday on final details. James called me at the house a little before eight o'clock on Saturday morning, and said that he had had a very bad night and did not feel like coming in. He'd had no sleep at all, was going to take some medicine and get some sleep, and did I think that I could carry on that morning by myself. I said, "Sure, no problem. Don't worry about it and I'll give you a call this afternoon and see how you're feeling." So, I stayed until noon and wrapped the project up. When I reached home my husband met me at the door, telling me, "Call Bill Moyers right away." I called Bill, did not get him because he had left, but I got his

secretary, Carol. Carol said, "James is dead." He had overdosed with sleeping pills. Whether accidentally or not, no one ever knew. It was quite a bitter blow to me.

[END SIDE TWO]

[BEGIN SIDE THREE]

FJG: O.K. You at one point started to tell us a story about Billy Graham and Ike.

GBK: [Laughter]

FJG: Can you tell us that, that sounds good.

GBK: Tom Stephens, President Eisenhower's Appointments Secretary, was a prankster and was always playing practical jokes on members of the staff. Some called him eccentric, and he was. He was a delightful person to work for, very dedicated to President Eisenhower, with a great sense of humor. Once Eisenhower buzzed several times then finally came out and asked where Tom Stephens was. I said, "Mr. President, he's out on the south grounds putting praying mantis eggs on the trees." [Laughter] President Eisenhower looked at me like he thought somebody was nuts. One morning I came in and I looked beside my desk, and here was this huge cage of fifty thousand ladybugs, because Tom had found that ladybugs were good to release in the garden to get rid of aphids. He was a great gardener. He grew mushrooms in his closets!

One day Billy Graham came in. I discovered through the administrations that Billy Graham wrote almost the same letter to each President, seeking his entry into the Oval Office. He said practically the same thing because, before I even opened it, I would start quoting and everybody would laugh at me because I

always knew exactly what it was going to say. Before Billy Graham went in to see President Eisenhower, the President had told Tom Stephens in advance that he didn't want to give him more than five minutes. Shortly before the time was up, Tom went in to conclude the appointment and found Billy Graham kneeling, and Tom started to help him up. Tom Stephens came out, saying, "Hell, I was helping him up off the floor, I didn't know he was praying!" [Laughter] "I thought he had stumbled." [Laughter] Whether it was true or not, I do not know, but Tom Stephens told it with a straight face. [Laughter]

Going back to things that made me sort of sad during the Johnson administration. Fred [Frederick G.] Dutton had an excellent secretary, a college graduate from the University of Chicago. She was black, very attractive, Gerry [Geraldine D.] Whittington. She and I became good friends and would have lunch together from time to time.

PAS: Hm hmm.

GBK: Among other members of the staff [Dutton] had a counsel named Lee White. One night I was working very late and Johnson came out--and this is very restricted because only a few people know this story and it makes me very bitter most of my life--and he came out and said, "Lee, we got any good looking niggers on this staff?" And I thought, "Oh my God, there goes Gerry's job," and sure enough, Gerry Whittington and I, we went out to lunch and she wept about it because she was trying very hard to do a very good job and was a very capable person. She was also hoping to work up so she could be assistant to ambassadors to one of the African countries, and she would have done a very excellent job in that. So she is very sad about this and she is transferred to the other side with Juanita Roberts and her

job consists of listing autographed photographs and taking care of routine matters like that--nothing of any substance or challenge. I felt so sorry for Gerry. I didn't know what to do. And she stayed in that position and sort of withered away and then early in... I guess it was before he actually left office, she had a stroke and never recovered from it and she was only 29 years old, and I just felt very bitter because her career had been smashed by an impulse of President Johnson and wanting to expose her in his outer office. See, I'm good to the blacks and all that and I don't think it was a very kind thing to do, and he was capable of doing things like that.

PAS: When she transferred over, she transferred on her own accord? You said she transferred to the autograph/photograph...

GBK: She had no choice.

PAS: Oh, that was that then?

GBK: Yes.

PAS: I see.

FJG: How far in advance would Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson's schedules be set up? Was there a difference in the three of them?

GBK: Well, we had a running schedule. We had a book that would have things slipped in it for certain days. The Suspense File. Then they would be distributed to the press, and to the key members of the staff. It was finalized the night before. Many appointments would be scheduled months in advance and kept in the Suspense File.

FJG: Were any of them particularly prone to changing the schedule suddenly? You had spent weeks getting these things set up and somebody would come in, he would just come in and say, "Well, I don't want to do that, I want to go talk to so and so."

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GBK: President Johnson did it more often than anyone else. There were some occasions when, I think that it happened, that President Kennedy just really did not feel very well, because he had troubles with his back. President Eisenhower, except for his illnesses, was very conscientious about seeing the people. As time goes on, somehow, the Presidents seemed to be seeing more people or groups. President Eisenhower usually saw most of the people that he agreed to see. President Johnson would change his mind about some things. I know one of the reasons that I did not like travelling with President Johnson was the fact that you never knew. Once I went to Florida when he gave a speech in Miami Beach. We were to leave the next morning from Miami. Secret Service Agent [REDACTED] pounded on my door at two A.M. and said, "We've got to go." I said, "What happened?" He said, "Johnson's changed his mind, he's going to take off now from another Air Force base." He had gotten angry about something, and I don't remember what it was, but he was not going to take off from the Miami airport. The plane was moved to another place. The Secret Service and I and several other people had to travel several hours, down into the Everglades, to meet the plane that we were going on. I'm telling you, it was one horrible mess [laughter]. Johnson was prone to pulling these little surprises. He would come out in the office, say, "Going to Texas at five o'clock, go pack your bags." I was very skillful over all the years in not going to Texas. I swore I was not going to that ranch no matter what. I remember one time he came out and he said, "How long will it take you to pack your

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bags?" I said, "Mr. President, I can't possibly go. My daughter is very sick and I can't wait to get out of this office to go see her." "She is?" The next time I thought, "What excuse am I going to have next time?" [laughter] I think he finally got the message, but I got on that trip to California. Edward Kennedy had his plane accident when we were in San Francisco. We went out to California to dedicate the Irvine campus, among other things. We stayed at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco and were busy as bumble bees. I was travelling with Ken O'Donnell. Ken O'Donnell got word that night that Edward Kennedy had a plane accident. Ken flew back East and left me to "carry on".

FJG: Were there any peculiarities in the President's scheduling? For example, I know President Nixon liked to keep one day a week free, essentially have no schedule, although that wasn't always possible. Was there anything like that that Presidents Eisenhower and...?

GBK: Well, the one thing that I do remember significantly was that President Eisenhower, when the weather was good, he went to Burning Tree [Country Club]. I think he tried to keep most of his afternoons free. I don't recall any peculiarities, particularly, about President Kennedy. He seemed to be pretty flexible and he liked Ken very much. Ken and Larry [Lawrence F.] O'Brien, seemed to be the determining factor insofar as travels and appointments were concerned. Ken protected President Kennedy from too much staff intrusion.

I liked Ken very much and I was very sad when he died so untimely. I'd love to go up to the [Kennedy] Library in Boston.

PAS: I was going to ask you if you'd ever been there.

GBK: Never been up there. I'd like to see....

FJG: Dave Powers?

GBK: Yes.

FJG: Did you ever have much contact with Robert Kennedy?

GBK: Yes. One of my prized possessions is the letter that he wrote to me after the President's death, when he was Attorney General, thanking me for my contribution and for being a friend. The last time I saw Robert Kennedy was during his campaign. I took off a week that July to visit my friend in Skaneateles, New York, which is near Syracuse. I was flying to Syracuse, reading my book when someone leaned over and said, "What are you doing on my plane?" It was Robert Kennedy. He invited me to join his group in first class. He invited me to join his motorcade--he was there to open the fair. I said I couldn't possibly do it. "If President Johnson sees me in that motorcade with you," I said, "My goose is cooked with him anyway!" [Laughter] I said, "That's all I would need!"

His entourage got off of the plane first. When I got off, my friend, Janice [George] was jumping up and down. She said, "I saw Robert Kennedy, I saw Robert Kennedy!" I said, "Yes, I know. I just had a drink with him." I said, "He invited you and me to go on the motorcade." She said, "I'll kill you! You turned it down?" [laughter] Of course it would not have been appropriate. That was the last time I ever saw him.

I liked him. When he came to confer with President Kennedy he was very somber and very serious, and apparently was a

valuable adviser to the President. I think President Kennedy valued his opinion and advice and sought it often.

I remember a time, very shortly after President Johnson came into office, President Johnson invited Robert and Ethel Kennedy to the office when Robert Kennedy was getting ready to leave as Attorney General. He and Mrs. Kennedy had chosen to walk from the Department of Justice, through the park, to the White House. She had walked barefooted. When she got to my office, her feet were dirty with dust and grime. She said to me, "Is there a place I can wash up before we go into the President's office?" [laughter]. I thought to myself, "Now, where in the world am I going to take this woman?" I took Ethel Kennedy down into a little bathroom off Ted [Theodore C.] Sorenson's office so that she could wash her feet and legs and put her sandals back on so she could go in to see the President [laughter]. I always thought that was the funniest thing. That was one of my few contacts with Ethel Kennedy, she was very natural. The real mystique of the Kennedys will always be "what might have been".

FJG: Let's skip ahead, past the Nixon administration, and into the [Gerald R.] Ford administration. You stayed on, you worked a little bit, you left, and you came back.

GBK: Well, I stayed until late August [1974], (but actually I was not off of the White House roll until mid-October because I just had overtime accumulated.) I went back from time to time, checking with Susan (Porter) Rose. I think this is probably why I was called and asked to come back to do the volunteer work because Susan and I knew each other so well. So, I became involved in

some of the things.

It was fun. I could go to the functions, and I had a parking place. I could come in after rush hour and leave before rush hour. I could take some drafting home, and do it on my typewriter there. I didn't get paid, but it was just a nice way to ease out. Many people ask me, "Wasn't it [an] awful letdown retiring after such exciting (and I use the word 'hectic' instead of exciting) years?" My response is, "Well, it really was very nice because I eased out through retirement by volunteering and choosing my hours." Then the urge to move to California became so great that it overshadowed everything else. I haven't missed it. I left the day Queen Elizabeth came [laughter].

FJG: So, your work as a volunteer was working for the First Lady?

GBK: Yes. I worked for Mrs. [Elizabeth B.] Ford. Susan (Porter) Rose often chuckled and said, "It's unbelievable how much you did." I think I contributed something. Susan was delighted because it relieved her of a lot of writing and freed her to attend functions with Mrs. Ford, as her Appointments Secretary. Occasionally we both could go, but if something rush came up, I could fill in. It was a very nice relationship, one I enjoyed and was happy to do.

PAS: I had just one other note down here. Were there many negative issues, other than maybe Watergate, that you had to deal with, or seemingly negative issues, that the First Lady [had] written about [her]? I know that there was one that I have seen written somewhere about Mrs. Nixon's smoking, in one instance.

GBK: Yes, she went, as I recall, for a family gathering and she went

to Trader Vic's at the Sheraton [Hilton Hotel] on Sixteenth Street. She lit a cigarette. We didn't get an awful lot of letters about that. Today we would probably get more. I think our response was that Mrs. Nixon seldom smoked and this was an occasional thing. She normally didn't light up in public, which was quite true.

We didn't get too much flack about the jewelry either. We got few letters of criticism because Mrs. Nixon was well loved and well liked, and even up through Watergate. There were never very many critical of her. We had some nasty letters written to her about Watergate because they knew that she was a good conduit to the President, then hoping that they could vent their venom on the President through her.

PAS: Maybe it was in Julie's book [Pat Nixon: The Untold Story] also, there was something about her trying to take Kennedy things out of the White House. That she had moved something out of a room, or something.

GBK: I remember....

PAS: Was it a mantelpiece or something?

GBK: Mrs. Kennedy had an inscription placed on a wooden mantel in the First Lady's bedroom saying, "In this room lived John Fitzgerald Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline during 2 years, ten months and two days he was President of the United States." Mrs. Nixon replaced it with a historic late eighteenth century marble mantel by Benjamin Latrobe.

PAS: It seemed to me that it really upset Mrs. Nixon at the time. That she was being accused of doing something like that.

GBK: It did. One Washington newspaper stated Mrs. Nixon was "Erasing White House History." But the decision to remove the mantel was made by the Committee on the Preservation of the White House, late in the Johnson administration, with Lady Bird Johnson presiding. Things like that always upset her because she tried very hard. She was very careful to try to "steer the right course" as she would say [laughter].

PAS: If anything, she really helped the White House become more historic, I know. I've read a lot about that.

GBK: Yes.

PAS: She never took much credit for that though.

GBK: It's quite true, she didn't. She worked long and hard with Clem [Clement E.] Conger. The reason I became involved with it was that Clem Conger started drafting thank-you letters for her signature to the people who made donations to the White House of these wonderful historic pieces of furniture, objects or manuscripts. Mrs. Nixon would turn the drafts over to me to re-do. So, from then on, I wrote the thank-you[s] and learned the extent of the acquisitions for the White House. That was one of her goals, along with making the White House more accessible and more attractive for the tours. Jacqueline Kennedy really started that. It was she who originated the first tour books and conducted a televised tour through the White House when she was First Lady. Mrs. Nixon picked up where she left off, and contributed greatly to the acquisitions, working through Clem Conger.

FJG: I just have one other question planned. You may not be the one

to answer it, I don't know. Maybe Connie Stuart's a better one to answer it. In [H.R.] Haldeman's notes of his meetings with the President, there are references to something that he called

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I'm wondering if you had any idea, what he is referring to?

GBK:

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I am quite sure that Connie will be able to clarify that. They wanted to ignore her, it seemed to me, except when they wanted to use her. Mrs. Nixon had her own ideas, and I think most of them were good, of how she'd conduct herself as First Lady. Sometimes they didn't jibe with what the West Wing thought. But Connie would be the one to ask for that, and Lucy Winchester. Because I think they had "problems" with Lucy too, and Lucy was involved on the social scene. I stayed pretty close to my desk.

FJG: O.K., well that's all I have.

PAS: Hm hhm. Unless there's something else you want to say.

GBK: I think we've pretty much covered the waterfront.

FJG: O.K.

GBK: I want to say that Mrs. Nixon is my favorite First Lady. I think that she did a tremendous job, I hope she knows it, and that she gets credit for it.

PAS: Thank you.

GBK: All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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 conducted by Paul A. Schmidt and Frederick J. Graboske
 at the Nixon Project in Alexandria, Virginia
 on May 24, 1988

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