

Exit Interview
With
PENELOPE A. ADAMS
On
September 26, 1973



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff
National Archives and Records Administration

Exit interview with Penelope Ann Adams
conducted by Susan Yowell
in the East Wing of the White House
on September 26, 1973

SY: ...the oral history project, the interviewee would be a little better prepared than I am right now to talk with you, and by probably going through the files that you leave behind.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: And trying to find some of the areas that are lacking in documentation.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: So much is done over the telephone and in person and so forth that...

PA: Yes.

SY: ...sometimes what, that sometimes...

PA: [Laughter].

SY: ...the files are not very good, and then other times they're fantastic. But [unintelligible]....

PA: Well, in my case, I really don't know how good the files will be...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...because I have never had a secretary. And wearing virtually four different hats...

SY: Right.

PA: ...on this staff, I was lucky if I got anything at all on paper.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And, so most of it was done on the telephone. And there are handwritten notes, but, and naturally some correspondence, but I simply did not have time...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...to do very much correspondence.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So very much of my work was done on the phone, or in meetings. And I was lucky if I got the files filed.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: You know, I think, sometimes I'd have two piles stacked up as high as that television set before I had an evening free that I could just spend on filing them myself, because I....

SY: Hmm.

PA: That's one thing about this staff, there's such a small staff that there really are no file clerks, or just people who type, you know, everybody really has a substantive kind of job. And you just have to, you know, do most of your typing yourself or most of your filing yourself, and make your own...

SY: Right.

PA: ...appointments and, I mean, everybody did their own thing.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So, I don't know how fantastic my files are going to be, but I plead innocence [laughter].

SY: Well, at least you have files.

PA: Because when you're putting in an eighteen hour day, as I have done...

SY: Right.

PA: ...and even more, you know, everything isn't in pluperfect order...

SY: Sure.

PA: ...as far as the filing is concerned.

SY: Listen, before we begin I should tell you the tapes now are really just being held in limbo in our office. We don't have the clerical staff either, at this point, to do the transcribing. And, as a matter of fact, when we first started this we were just taking notes. And trying to write some kind of a narrative summary, which was a disaster.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: Because to try and interpret what someone else said into a nice concise summary really was just kind of defeating the purpose of oral history, certainly.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: And we're keeping the tapes, and hopefully we'll have them transcribed before the President leaves office. We would, we've had a few of them transcribed. Our summer interns did a few this past summer, as a matter of fact.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: And we'll just get to them as soon as we can. And obviously we'll send you a draft, which you can edit

and ch[ange], you know, add anything you want. The tapes are now being considered, just like any of the files, as the President's personal property...

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: ...and would not be given to a researcher now. Of course, eventually this....

PA: Or a committee [laughter].

SY: But, they're put in that same category and would be considered, if anyone requested use of them, they would be considered as presidential papers...

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: ...and would go through the channels, I mean, that's not to say they could not, absolutely could not be seen by anyone, but they would have to be cleared...

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: ...and so forth, through the regular channels. The President could, just like presidential papers would have to.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: So, again we're not trying to go into sensitive areas now, however, the tapes are confidential in that sense.

PA: Hm hmm. Hm hmm.

SY: Well, we have some very basic outline things we like to go over. When did you first come to the staff, Penny?

PA: My start date was December 1st 1969.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I was interviewed by Connie [Constance C.] Stuart on

Halloween [laughter], so that was the end of October.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And I actually started December first.

SY: How were you recruited? You say you were interviewed by Connie.

PA: Hm hmm. Well, as Claire Crawford wanted to say in the [Washington] Daily News, she said that I'm a "matron from Montgomery County [Maryland]," which I didn't really appreciate [Susan Yowell laughter]. I had seen Connie's appointment in the newspaper and I had known Connie, not well, but had known her at the University of Maryland. And in reading the article and seeing her picture, at first I wasn't sure I really knew who it was, because I didn't know the name "Stuart." And I said, "Oh, my gosh that's Connie Cornell!" And I said, "Isn't that fantastic! She'd just be perfect for the job." Because, I was two years behind her at the University of Maryland, and it was kind of hero worship, on my part, because she was outstanding at the University of Maryland campus. And I remember, you know, that she was on mortarboard, and she was, you know, this, that and the other thing. In the theatre and so forth.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So I said, "Oh she would really be terrific." Except I'm not one to write fan letters. I never have, particularly with the people that, you know, I don't

know very well, or don't know at all. But I did feel kind of compelled to write her a letter congratulating her. Which I did. And said in the letter that I'd always admired and respected Mrs. Nixon and I would be delighted to volunteer some time to address envelopes, or lick stamps, or whatever. And I also brought her up to date on what I had been doing, thinking I might jog her memory a little bit, and she might remember who I was, because I wasn't at all sure that she would. I said that I had completed my master's degree in radio and TV and had been working in the field part time, and this, that and the other thing.

So, I think it was just a couple of days later I got a telephone call from her, you know, from her then administrative assistant, Stephanie Wilson, asking if I'd be interested in coming in and interviewing for a position.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So, I just about fell over. My husband quick scraped me off the floor and he said, "Get your resume together and go to it," you know. So, I came in and Connie and I had a long talk over in her office here. And, as I say, it was Halloween day. I remember because the [Washington] Evening Star had just come out with a beautiful picture of the big pumpkin and, I think, Tricia [(Nixon) Cox] and some of the children, and everybody was very excited about the press coverage

that day. And we talked and reviewed what I'd been doing, and so forth. And then she said, "Well, uh," you know, "we'll let you know something in the next couple weeks." And the next couple weeks did pass by and I got a call saying they'd like me to start...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...in a couple weeks, if I was willing. And I said, "Fine, I'll be there."

SY: Has your actual job title remained the same for...

PA: No, it has not.

SY: ...your entire time you have been here?

PA: I was hired as radio and television coordinator to Mrs. Nixon. Upon Connie's departure, I believe it was the end of March or the beginning of April [1973], Helen Smith became press secretary.

SY: Right.

PA: Not staff director--that position has never been filled. Connie held the dual role as staff director and press secretary. Helen had been called many things, one of which was deputy press secretary. Well, when she became press secretary, I was made deputy press secretary.

SY: Hmm.

PA: But, in essence, my responsibilities have remained the same.

SY: Hm hmm. Were you, then, you were hired expressly for the television and radio coordinator...

PA: Right.

SY: ...role? Although your responsibilities evolved to include many more things...

PA: Right.

SY: ...than this.

PA: Exactly.

SY: Well, could you attempt to describe what it is you have been doing in the...? I know you outlined it very well in this resume. You might even want to look at this while you're doing it. And anything that you would like to add to this, particularly in areas that would not be well documented, and which particular areas you might like to talk about.

PA: It's been awhile since I did this.

SY: And obviously there....

PA: Well, I suppose maybe I should just give a synopsis of the four areas that I've been responsible for. Of course the main emphasis was the radio and television coverage, which would be responsible for any event that would be considered public, or if Mrs. Stuart, and then Mrs. Smith, had decided would be open for, quote, press coverage.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And, for me, that could mean a lot of things. That could mean hand held silent cameras, in which case there would be no point in radio even showing up. In other words, it would be more of what we would consider

a photo opportunity, where Mrs. Nixon, Julie [(Nixon) Eisenhower], or Tricia would not be making any formal remarks of any kind.

It could be a situation where it might be hand held, with natural sound. In other words, we would let the networks and the local stations have sound, but it was just to get a natural effect of the event, but not to be putting their microphones up in front of the principal's face for specific remarks while she was, for instance, talking to people in a receiving line. Which we think is on a personal level and should not, you know, we should not make her feel inhibited by having a microphone right up in front of her face while she's greeting people.

Or, it could certainly be a more complex setup, where we would have actual camera stands in a certain area, for instance in the East Room, or the South lawn, or wherever the event happened to be. The cameramen would be on platforms and we would have what we would call a multibox, where there would be one microphone in front of Mrs. Nixon, Julie, or Tricia, with a line running to a box where many people could plug in and pick up the sound. This would be a more formal setup, when we actually knew that the women had prepared remarks.

SY: Hm humn.

PA: This was always an easier event to sell. The networks

were always certainly more interested in showing up if we told them that one of the ladies was going to make remarks, formal remarks.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Sometimes you would plan in advance that, yes, there would be an opportunity for the correspondents to ask Mrs. Nixon or one of the girls questions after an event. And at other times it was made clear that there would not be an opportunity...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...to ask questions. So we had that kind of a setup. Or, there would be, we've done a lot of what I classify as TV specials. Interviews that were actually set up with one correspondent or another. For instance, Fay Wells's Storer Broadcasting did one and Marya McLaughlin has done a couple with Mrs. Nixon for CBS. A very fine one was done with Ginny [Virginia] Sherwood of ABC. And these have turned out to be interviews with Mrs. Nixon, or Julie or Tricia, and then integrated into film clips that the network has put together. It could turn out to be a half hour or an hour special on one of our ladies, that has gone on...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...either a network, or Storer, of course, is a group station. Those took, perhaps, weeks of planning and going over script, and discussing questions with the interviewer, or the producer. And then setting up a

place in the [White] House, or as the one with Virginia Sherwood, out at San Clemente. And, you know, the whole business of clearing crews and making sure that there was, you know, enough light and enough electricity...

SY: Hmm.

PA: ...and, you know, so forth and so on. So those were quite a lot more complex than just regular events that the ladies might have here in the House.

SY: Was there more effort, on your part, directed in the area of the technical or mechanical aspects of an event, or were you equally concerned with the actual format, or with the content of an event, with what would actually be said?

PA: I was concerned very much with both, but the one thing we do have to keep in mind, and always have in the back of our mind, was that in no way, in discussing a plan for a program with a producer or correspondent, did we ever want to say anything that would lead them to believe that we were trying to censor in any way what it was that they wanted to do, or what they wanted to ask Mrs. Nixon.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: We could give them guidelines as to what might be of interest to her; there may be part of the story that she would like to tell or she would like to get across. They did the preliminary script work or the preliminary

plan and then they would come here, and perhaps Connie and I would sit down with them and we would discuss various areas.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But we tried, as I say, not to ever let them feel that we were trying to censor, actually, to plan the program for our own ends.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And normally these specials were done at the request of the network or the group station. We didn't go out and seek them. This is a unique position here. I suppose if you work almost anyplace else that, when you're trying to sell a program, you go out looking...

SY: Right.

PA: ...for media and for press to do something. Where we had to take in consideration all these requests and were only able to pick a few out of the multitude that, of course, that we received.

SY: How closely did you coordinate with Al [Alvin A.] Snyder's office on scheduling events on radio and television?

PA: Well, it's difficult to say. We coordinated to a degree, not a great degree. Of course his main function, I think, was getting the ladies on interview programs throughout the country. He would schedule things like the [Irv] Kupcinet show, or.... Oh, I'm trying to think of some of the other ones that he's

done throughout the country. Our main function was, for instance, when we got a request from a network to do something with Mrs. Nixon, here in the House or at San Clemente, or perhaps if she [were] on a trip to Africa, or on one of these trips that she took around the country. One she did for volunteerism, one she did for "Legacy of the Parks" program.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But, anytime the ladies were going out for a specific, local kind of function, let's say to New Orleans, or to Chicago, or someplace like that, Al would be the one who was setting up the local TV interviews while they were out of town...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...when they did not have a press person such as myself traveling with them or advancing them.

SY: Hmm. So you really didn't overlap in your function?

PA: No. If it got to the point where we seemingly would overlap we would check with each other. But that was, really I found that to be quite rare.

SY: Hm hmm. Also, I wanted to ask you if you coordinated with Herbert Klein's staff, other than Al Snyder, on scheduling.

PA: No.

SY: Someone...

PA: Not really, no.

SY: ...[unintelligible].

PA: Mm mmm [no], hm hmm. I think they really dealt, mostly, perhaps with the President and Cabinet members and, I suppose, during the campaign, although I really don't know, you know, major administrative types...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...who were going out speaking for the President, since he wasn't on the road that much himself.

SY: What about, I know that Judy Kaufman did a lot of work with the women surrogates, and also just with women in the administration, women appointees. Were you involved at all in that, just because you were in the same general field? I understand, and correct me if I'm wrong, that you were involved only in events which included a member of the First Family and would not go to other staff and coordinate their appearances.

PA: That's right, only our three ladies.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I got involved, to a degree, with Ed [Edward R. F.] Cox's events, strictly by telephone,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...in a couple of instances. When he would be visiting, I would call the stations ahead of time, from here. Say it was Boston--I'm just taking that as an example--I'd call ahead of time and go right down the list of radio and TV stations in that area, saying that Ed Cox would be at a certain place at a certain time.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And thought they'd likely be interested. And
[unintelligible] be interested [unintelligible], to get
their credentials and so forth and so on.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But during the campaign, particularly, I was on the
road practically solidly, after the convention, until
the election, for the three women. I'd go out and I
would set it up, set up the press and sometimes I would
stay for the event, to make sure it went all right.
Sometimes, such as out in New Mexico, I'd set up the
Los Alamos stop for Julie and the Santa Fe stop for
Julie, and tell the people out there what should be
done. And then I'd have to move on to Carlsbad, New
Mexico and set that up, and I didn't have time to get
back up to Santa Fe to see the actual event take place.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So I was just really hopping all over the place...

SY: Right.

PA: ...during those two months.

SY: Did you have additional help during that busy campaign
period?

PA: Once I got out there I did.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I had people from the Reelect Committee [the Committee
to Reelect the President], or the Republican National
Committee to help me. I didn't do the full advance. I
did the press advance. There was always an advance man

who set up the major arrangements. Although a lot of them, frankly, were, they were volunteers. Some were stock brokers, and some were, I don't know, lawyers, bankers, I don't know what they were, from that, many times from that particular city where the event was being done,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...but not necessarily. And a lot of them had either done, perhaps, maybe some advancing for the President, but had never had advanced for Mrs. Nixon or one of the girls. It's a different kind of advance. It's a different kind of event. They are much lower key than the President. And sometimes they'd turn to me for advice and I would try to be as helpful as I could, because I have done complete advances...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...for Mrs. Nixon, from top to bottom, not just the press advance. So I really could answer some of their other questions about program and so forth.

SY: Hm hmm. When you did complete advances for the First Lady or for the girls, was that done in a very similar way, as they did for the President's advance?

PA: I would assume so,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...but I would guess not, not quite as complicated.

SY: Did you attend an advance seminar that was really conducted by the President's advance staff for the

First Lady's staff?

PA: Well, what we had was Ron [Ronald H.] Walker came over here one day,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...and spent a day with us. And there were some other people who came in and talked to us. I'm trying to remember who. We had a one day seminar here, in Connie's office.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And we had various people come in and talk to us about how things were done on the President's side. And I remember Ron Walker did come and talk to us too.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And we were given a sheet or, a checklist, and all the things to look out for and a diagram of the presidential aircraft and a whole lot of things that were a lot more sophisticated than we really got into.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But it was helpful for us to know that. We had a one day advance school [Susan Yowell laughter], compared to, I suppose, weeks that they have over there.

SY: [Unintelligible], yeah, right, I know. But you relied still, for the most part, on them for the head advance work, and then you did the press work [unintelligible].

PA: All during the campaign that's true. And I was trying to think.... Yes, you're right, for the most part that is true. Except for here in Washington. When I'm

doing an advance here in Washington at a[n] event, in the White House or in the surrounding area, then I do the full advance.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Without any help from the President's advance team.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: When I did Medford, Oregon, on the "Legacy of Parks" trip, that was my complete advance. Everyone was looking to me for supervision and approval. And we managed. We did well in the end, but it was two weeks of hardly any sleep at all. And, you know, really being thrown in the water and having to swim.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But it [unintelligible]. We were real proud of it afterwards. That was the responsibility for everything, from top to bottom on that one. In Africa, I was the press advance to Africa. Bill [William R.] Codus from the State Department was Mrs. Nixon's head advance man. He was the advance man a week ahead of time to set up all the press areas in the three countries.

SY: What about, I know you were the coordinator for the First Lady's staff for the people at the Naval Photographic Center. What did that involve?

PA: We produced about four films. I'm sorry to say that we haven't produced any more, but there really hasn't been a call for it. On footage that was shot by the Naval

Photographic crew, film crew, on her volunteer trips around the country, which we came up with a film called, "Small Splendid Efforts." And we did a film on Mrs. Nixon's trip to Peru, when she took relief supplies down to Peru after the earthquake. And the Navy film crew had gone along and shot a lot of footage. We did Tricia's wedding. We did a long film on Tricia's wedding. And we did Mrs. Nixon's trip to Africa. And what I did, literally, was to spend hours over there looking at footage with the editor and with the White House liaison over there, Jack Horton. And then they would put together a rough script and I would go over the script and approve it, or make changes, or discuss changes, and they would do what they call a "rough cut." And I'd look at that and I'd say, "Fine, that looks good," or "We should maybe change this around, take that out, and put this in," or something. And then they'd do what they call a "fine cut." And then I'd approve that or make changes there. Then you go into what is called sound effects, music and narration, which is the next step, [unintelligible] step. Then you can have an "answer" print, and that's your final product.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And, so each time one of these steps was ready, I'd go over and review it, and approve it, or recommend changes, until we finally came through with the final

print.

SY: What about, who planned what actually would be filmed?

PA: Well, uh....

SY: I understand the Navy photographs or films most of the public events in which First Family members are involved.

PA: Right. Really, no special favors were done for the Naval Photographic crew. They really, in essence, could only get what everyone else gets. In other words, if we had open coverage of an event, ABC, CBS, NBC, anybody who wanted to, could get...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...the same picture that the Navy photo crew got. We did not set up any special events and only let them in.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So, if an event was open to coverage, they got it. And then they had all this footage, for instance, from Africa. Every place Mrs. Nixon went, and where there was open press coverage, they shot just like everybody else.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And they just had these hundreds of feet of film. And then we tried to put it together in some kind of concise form that would tell a story.

SY: Hm hmm. You just notified them, along with the press, of any opportunity?

PA: Hm hmm, exactly. They are on the list,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...just like everybody else. I call about seventeen different people every time Mrs. Nixon or Julie and Tricia do any event here at the White House or in Washington, that's open for coverage [unintelligible].

SY: Hm hmm. Once these four films were made, then what was the, what was your involvement in the distribution of these films, in showing them?

PA: Actually, they haven't gotten wide distribution. I think that it must be policy, perhaps something like the USIA [United States Information Agency] that these films will go into the Nixon Library, go into the National Archives and the White House Library here, but I'm not really clear on this. Whether it's policy that it does not receive wide distribution, for instance, throughout universities and schools and local libraries and this kind of thing. I don't know. I know that Connie Stuart had been looking into the possibility of distributing "Small Splendid Efforts" with Modern Talking Pictures. But it became, I think, as I recall, rather an expensive kind of situation, and we had no money.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And there, you know, we couldn't pay anybody to distribute it. It would have had to have been strictly volunteering their services to do it, and I guess...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...they didn't feel they were in the position just to volunteer their stamps, and their personnel time, and this, that and the other thing.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So that never got distributed. I did, personally, send out some prints of the Peru relief, I think, to some of the agencies that had been involved in raising money for Peru relief, but it was on a limited basis.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Because, after all, I was very busy doing many other things. To keep all the records and make sure films got in, and films got back, and films got cleaned, and then sent out again, you know. That just really, I simply didn't have that kind of time to do it, and no one around here did.

SY: Hm hmm. What about, were you involved in any editing when a, when one of the networks, or a film was privately made,...

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: ...what was the extent of your involvement in editing and reviewing any final product before it would be shown?

PA: Well, naturally they wanted to show it to us ahead of time.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But, we may have made a few comments about this, that or the other thing. But, as I mentioned before, you

just really didn't get into anything too much as far as content was concerned, because then they could accuse you of trying to censor it.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And we just, I think unfairly, were accused of that. I remember, of course this has nothing to do with an interview, but we had wanted to get "1776" down here for an Evening at the White House. But we wanted them to cut it to forty-five minutes, because that was our normal time for an Evening at the White House. That's what the President had wanted, that's the standard time arrangement for [an] Evening at the White House. And I think that everyone felt that with, you know, a receiving line first, and then entertainment, and then hors d'oeuvres, and then dancing, and this, that and the other thing, that that was a long enough evening. Well, we asked the people from "1776" to cut it down to forty-five minutes, or maybe even an hour. And they completely took it the wrong way, and thought that we were trying to censor their play and cut out parts that didn't appeal to the administration, or something, which was just ridiculous!

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Well, they said, "We'll do it, but we'll only do it if we can do the full play." Well, finally we said, "All right, fine." So we did the whole play. But we had been accused, and in print, of trying to censor...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...various parts of the play, which was just ludicrous.
So we always watch out for that.

SY: Right. You're getting into one of your other areas.

PA: Right.

SY: And that was in the scheduling for social
entertainment.

PA: Hm hmm.

SY: Who did you work with on that?

PA: Well, there were various people [laughter].

SY: I know that Lucy Winchester's office functioned
somewhat independently from....

PA: Well, you see, and of course a lot of this is just
hearsay, because I was brought in what, ten, eleven
months into the first administration? And I'm not
really sure what happened before I got here. I think
that the entertainment primarily was done in Lucy's
office...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...by Debbie Murray, who then became Debbie Sloan.
Well, I was brought on board and, of course, several
others at the same time, and Connie Stuart had a staff
meeting that first day. And she said to me, "You will
be the in-house producer on the "Bob Hope Christmas
Show." Well, I just, as you can imagine, that was
December fourteenth! That was thirteen days away!
[Laughter] I just about died! But I don't know if

this was the first time Lucy had found out that entertainment was no longer in her bailiwick or what, but, I mean, I was, who was I to say anything? I was told by my boss what to do and so I did. And from then on out it was really a function that Connie got very involved in, that I then, of course, became very involved in. And which was also being directed, to a degree, by the West side, by Mr. [H.R.] Haldeman, from what I understand. Any suggestion that we had for talent went to him for approval. Or suggestions came from him, although suggestions did filter down from Mrs. Nixon about the kind of people she liked. I remember knowing very early in my time here that Mrs. Nixon liked Beverly Sills, for instance. But a lot of the other suggestions did come from the West side. So that's the way it worked for awhile.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And then there were some boo-boos made, I suppose, and the press didn't like the kind of entertainment that we were having. And so then it reverted back to Lucy and Mrs. Nixon. I was still doing all the, the more or less production work. I was still the in-house producer. But my bosses changed. It would be Haldeman to Stuart to Adams, and then it was Mrs. Nixon to Lucy to me. And then, for awhile, it seemed to revert back over to the West side again. And just recently there's been a big flap about the kind of entertainment here at

the White House, so now it's back over [laughter] with Mrs. Nixon. And Nancy Hanks of the National Endowment for the Arts is getting involved.

SY: Hmm.

PA: So it has, it's been, that area has been quite difficult for me, because I have tried hard to have a balance of entertainment. To talk with people at the State Department and see what kind of entertainment a particular visitor likes. And to keep in mind what the President and Mrs. Nixon like. And also make sure that we don't have all classical or all pop. And that we don't always have singers and we don't have too many piano players at the same time. We try to keep a balance. And not knowing who is running the show, sometimes has been a detriment, I think,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...to the, to trying to keep a good procedure, a good balance in entertainment. And I finally, in that particular area, I won't really get into it, but something finally did happen that I just could not put up with any longer, and I just wrote a memorandum asking that I be relieved of those duties, because it had gotten to the point where there was so much overlap...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...and things were beginning to fall through the cracks. And I would think that I was running

something, and all of a sudden someone else would show up and they were running it. And it was confusing to me, it was confusing to the artist, and I don't know if it's been straightened out yet, to tell you the truth.

SY: Well, you're, were you more involved in the production than in the selection, or was that really, as you're saying, waving up and down?

PA: It was waving up and down. I would be asked, I can't tell you how many times I've been asked to put together proposals on entertainment. Six month proposals, twelve month proposals, eighteen month proposals. Which I would do and I would research and I'd make [a] detailed memorandum, with tab "A" through "E", and send it over to somebody on the West side, and five weeks later they'd ask for a new proposal. And I don't know what they did with them. But we never seemed to follow any of those plans [laughter].

So, I, or I would be, say for one specific dinner, "Please get some thoughts together on the 'hmm-hmm' dinner." So, as I say, I'd call the State Department, talk to those people over there, try and find out what I could, get the availability of people from the Hurok Agency, or Columbia Artists management. I got to know these agents real well. And the kind of people that they handled, or International Famous Agency, for more popular types. And put down maybe a list of four, knowing that these people were available. And then,

depending on who it was at the time, I'd either send them to Connie, through the West side, or through Lucy up to Mrs. Nixon. And get them to put their order of preference.

But one problem was that many times we didn't even know if we were supposed to get entertainment until maybe a week, two weeks sometimes, if we were lucky. And then we were supposed to come up with something really great. And half the time the people they wanted weren't available by that time. And particularly with opera singers and classical musicians. My gosh, they are, you know, in concert all over the country, or in Europe, and people paid well in advance to hear, and it was very difficult for people like that to get out of a[n] engagement.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: They may want to, but they just simply can't. Pearl Bailey happened to be at the Fisher Theatre doing "Hello, Dolly!" and we were able to get her out of her engagement that night. She, you know, gave them an extra Saturday night or something for letting, the Nederlanders, the people who own the Fisher Theatre, let her out of her performance...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...that night to come her for the Brandt dinner, the Willy Brandt dinner. But that couldn't always be worked out.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I think, unfortunately, a lot of people seem to think that the White House calling, everybody just drops everything to come, but they have a lot of responsibilities. Maybe they'd like to drop everything, but they couldn't. And other people wouldn't.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And not everybody, it seems hard to believe, it doesn't now, after four years, but at first [laughter], you know, that people wouldn't just die to come here and entertain for the First Family, but that's.... You find that an awful lot of people in the entertainment field are political and, you know, if they happen to be Democrats, or happen to have been a celebrity for [George S.] McGovern, or [Edward M.] Kennedy, or [Hubert H.] Humphrey, or somebody like that...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...they don't want, they don't want to come.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And others are completely apolitical and it's their President, their country and they would be helping to make a visiting head of state enjoy his stay in this country, and that they would, they're delighted to do it.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: It just depends on the personality.

SY: Hm hmm. Did you ever work with Paul Keyes directly on schedule? I know his name has certainly been mentioned by the press as having made several suggestions as to entertainment at the White House and scheduling.

PA: Well, this is the sensitive area, because,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...yes, I have worked with Paul, and I don't know who's fault it is, but unfortunately that whole thing was just a miscommunication or something. All I knew was that all of a sudden no one had bothered to tell me in the way of a memorandum, no one had called me into their office to brief me. I had come back from volunteering two weeks of my time to help with ethnic entertainment at the Inaugural Committee, and all of a sudden he was making the decisions which I had been making. Which is all fine and dandy except that no coordination was done. And he didn't, nor did anyone else, come and say, "Well, what has been done in the past? Do you have a list of entertainers? I'm taking over. What's the procedure?" And no one said to me, "You're not doing it anymore." I mean, I'm over there in a rehearsal and all of a sudden he's telling the entertainer, who I had been working with on the telephone, what to do. I as, frankly, I turned to Lucy Winchester and I said, "Well, what should I do? Should I disappear under the woodwork?" And she said, "I don't know. Nobody's told me anything either." So,

this was very unfortunate.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So then it was obvious that he was making the decisions.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Sometimes from here, sometimes from out in California. And they were being made late. And the press did not, apparently, concur with his selections.

SY: Hmm.

PA: So, therefore, while I was still doing the production part of it, but not the decision part of it.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And we worked together for the POW [Prisoners of War] dinner. I did all the arrangements for transportation and hotels, and arrivals and departures, and all of this kind of thing. But, really, after the POW dinner it was just kind of, well, I, frankly, was disgusted at that point. I had made known verbally, to various people, that I thought something should be worked out. That there should be a structure, a procedure.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I didn't care if I was head honcho, but I just didn't, I hated seeing things look like we didn't know what we were doing here at the White House. And unfortunately,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...that's what it was beginning to look like, at least

to my mind that's what.... And I didn't particularly want to be a part of that. I'm a bit of a perfectionist, and if something's going to be done, I want it to be done right. And I don't want us to look bad.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So, I've been out of that for awhile.

SY: What has, has there been a significant, I know your title has changed, but has there been a significant change in your channels, or your responsibilities since Connie Stuart left?

PA: The only channel difference, of course, would be reporting to Helen Smith...

SY: Right.

PA: ...rather than Connie, but that really is....

SY: But it hasn't changed, really, the way you have functioned?

PA: No. The only difference might be that I became, perhaps, more involved, directly, with the writing press, as well as the radio and TV press.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Although I have always worked with, and had a good relation with the writing press. I made it a point to try and help Helen more with that end of it.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: If I could. In other words, if phone calls were coming through, they still wanted to talk to Helen. But

sometimes I could answer their questions for them.

SY: Hmm. It was just a matter of changing your major point of coordination.

PA: Right.

SY: What about your personal contact with the First Family? Have you had much contact with them, or has this mostly been through another member of the staff?

PA: It's been mostly through another member. It's been very much to my regret that I haven't had a closer contact with them, with the members of the First Family. But it, that seemed to be the chain of command.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: It was either through Connie or through Lucy.

SY: Hm hmm. What about when you're working on, say a television special with an individual member of the Family? Were you advising them on some of the more technical things that, oh, dress for a television show, or something like this?

PA: Yes, and it would probably either be done on the phone, or more than likely in the scenario that I would write.

SY: Hm hmm. You would make recommendations to them.

PA: Right. Hm hmm. Right.

SY: [Unintelligible].

PA: Most of my contact with them.... I would, naturally, I had some contact with them.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I don't mean that I didn't have any, but the chain of command, generally, was either through one of those two ladies, or my contact would be in a written form, or perhaps on the telephone.

SY: Did you have any staff working directly under you?

PA: When I first came aboard, Martha Doss came on as a press aide. In the press shop, when I was down there, it was Helen Smith, and Julie Robinson and myself, and Martha was our press aide. Well, then she became Connie's administrative assistant. Cindy [Lucinda] Shumaker was brought aboard, and she was our press aide. And then Terry [Ivey] was brought aboard as our press aide. Those three ladies, in essence, were really under Helen.

SY: Hmm.

PA: But Julie and I could use them for help if we needed it. Or, then, when Julie left and Cindy took her place, then Cindy and I used Terry. And now that Cindy's left and Patti's [Patricia J. Matson] in there, Patti and I can use Terry. Although I try not to use Terry very much, because her work load is, she's got a lot ...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...to do down there. And so I have, in the past, asked her to type some things for me, but...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...I've tried not to do it if I didn't absolutely have

to.

SY: Hm hmm. That brings up one thing we probably should cover on the tape. We were talking about files earlier,...

PA: Yeah.

SY: ...you've handled all of your files yourself.

PA: Absolutely, all of them.

SY: And, are any of your files incorporated into a central filing system for Connie's office, or for, you know, Helen Smith's office,...

PA: No, not really.

SY: ...general office files?

PA: Mm mmm [no]. I've sent some things down to Al or Ed [surnames unknown]...

SY: [Unintelligible].

PA: ...in Social Files. But I've tried to keep most of the entertainment files up here, because I found that I was always needing to go back and check something. It seemed that everytime you've made a contact with one of these people, and it's really wonderful, I've enjoyed it very much, because these people have become friends over the years, but they call you and they ask, you know, they come in for a tour, or they send friends your direction, or they need another copy of the tape, or they need some more pictures, or something like that.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So I have generally kept my entertainment files right here, where I could get my hands on them. Now some of the advance things I would, when the activity was over, I might send on down to Al in Social Files.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But even some of those, I've kept continual contact with people too. So I've kept a chronological filing system here. All of which is going to go downstairs on Saturday.

SY: To Central Files, to....?

PA: No, to Mrs. Nixon's Social Files.

SY: To Mrs., O.K., Mrs. Nixon's files, right. So, by the way, do you have an inventory of any files that you're sending down?

PA: No, no.

SY: O.K. Well,...

PA: [Laughter]

SY: ...[laughter]. If, you know, if someone does have an inventory of the files, it's obviously helpful to put in, with any statement of their responsibilities. Because the files are the best description you have of what you have been doing since you've been on the staff.

PA: I don't even think I can make an inventory, at this point, because I've already sent down about three big boxes of things to Al. All of which I told him to go ahead and integrate into his main filing system.

SY: They would have gone down under your name,...

PA: Oh, yes.

SY: ...so that they would be identified that way in the central filing system,...

PA: Oh, yes.

SY: ...of Central Files.

PA: Hm hmm. [Unintelligible] [laughter]. I know they're fantastic down there.

SY: They are.

PA: You need something, by God, they find it.

SY: That's right, yeah, they do. Well, we, I think we've fairly much covered at least, not in detail, but summarized your four major areas of work. Were there any additional responsibilities that you had which...? I'm sure there were many little things that you did from time to time, just because the staff was small and everyone seems to pitch in on all kinds of things. Is there anything that you would like to mention as having been a significant responsibility, outside of these four major ones? Something that maybe is not an ongoing thing, but which was a one time effort that you were involved in.

PA: Well, I guess a couple things come to mind. For instance, of course this could come under my radio/television heading, any requests to interview any members of the First Lady's staff, for instance Connie, I think, did a couple television interviews. I

remember one was for French TV. I set that up. And Henri Haller did one, I remember, in the kitchen, I believe it was CBS. There have been a few staff people whom I'd set interviews up with,...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...up for. And also, I remember, the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] was here and shot in the Lincoln Sitting Room for one of [Alfred] Alistair Cooke's specials. So, if there was anything about just shooting pictures of the White House, from the north grounds, or the south grounds, or in the House, we had several requests like that, I took care of. Or people sent films to Mrs. Nixon and they wanted her to look at them for possible use, you know, as entertainment, or just wanted her to know about a certain...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...program. And, I think, a couple of nursing films were sent to her, I would look at the films and review them, and send her a synopsis on the film.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And other than that, just off the top of my head, I really can't think of anything. Other than the fact that, even though no one has ever told me, and I'm sure, not in so many words told the other members of the staff, but, to me, I am constantly reminding myself that I am representing Mrs. Nixon and the First Family, and their administration in the White House, or this

country, if I'm abroad. And that just, on account of that, I've tried to, you know, make friends for the Family or, in whatever context I come into. I mean, for instance, if no one happens to be here in the evenings and the operator can't find anybody else, she sends phone calls our direction. I'm sure you probably get them as well. And then some little old man or little old woman on the other end of the phone who has a problem. They've got a daughter stuck down in South America they haven't heard from in weeks, I remember that happening one night. And I spent I don't know how much time on the phone, trying to find somebody at the State Department, somebody who could get word or a telegram or something.

SY: Hm hmm

PA: You know, just taking people's problems to heart and doing, letting them know that if they wrote in to you, or called on the phone, trying to get to Mrs. Nixon, that someone cared. Making sure that their request or their comments got channeled to the right people, and not just writing it off...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...as a kook, or somebody like that.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Or, I remember, another woman who's become, I guess, a friend, in a way. She called up and I answered the telephone. She had some gifts to give to Mrs. Nixon,

so I said I'd be glad to take them and give them to Mrs. Nixon. Well, she came up and her friend came up, and I gave them a tour and, so every year now I get a call from her [laughter] and her friends, and take them around. And they're big Republicans and big supporters of the First Family. And so, you know, you try to encourage that and do what you can for these people. Which is sort of, I guess, not really in your duties and responsibilities, but I'm sure we all try to do that.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And just let people know you care, because it's a big, big world out there, and an awful lot of people think the, you know, as a last resort for a problem, they'll call the First Lady.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: Naturally we can't put those calls through, but if you can somehow help them out a bit....

SY: Have you worked at all with any of the departments and agencies, or with offices outside of the White House on any extensive...

PA: Well, the State Department,...

SY: ...[unintelligible]?

PA: ...as far as entertainment's concerned. And certainly on the African trip I worked closely with the staff at the State Department. I'm trying to think. Well, of course, on the "Legacy of Parks" trip we worked closely

with GSA [General Services Administration] personnel...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...out there, in Medford and the other cities we went to. And depending on the event, just about any department or agency could get involved.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: It might be the, oh, Department of Interior, I know, we've worked with, and the Treasury Department. Mrs. Nixon did a ceremony on the steps of the Treasury building, I think it was about this time last year. And I know she did something just recently, over in Georgetown, with the Treasury Department, on a new coin or medal that Mary Brooks had come out with, a way of raising money for the [United States] Mint.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: And I think we've worked with just about all the departments...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...and all the agencies. As I say, it's been on an event by event kind of thing, not a constant...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...contact.

SY: Do you know who's replacing you?

PA: I don't believe anybody is.

SY: Hm hmm. What about, where, do you know where you are going after you leave the staff?

PA: Well, I'm taking about six weeks vacation.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: I'm not going anywhere. I'm going home and I'm going to rest, that's what I'm going to do. I'm looking for a job. The absolute optimum would be a[n] interesting, challenging, well paying, part time job near Columbia, Maryland [laughter]. Which I think is going to be an absolute impossibility [laughter]. So I'm pursuing everything.

SY: Right.

PA: I'm looking in the government, I'm looking out of government, I'm looking Baltimore, I'm looking Columbia, I'm looking Montgomery County, I'm looking down here, in Washington.

SY: Is there any particular reason why you are leaving the staff at this time?

PA: There's several. One, hopefully I can find a job closer to home, because I've been driving at least an hour in and an hour home every night for four years.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: So, I would like to find a job that's not so far away. Second, a job where the hours are, perhaps, a little more regular.

SY: Hmm.

PA: I've enjoyed....

SY: I know so many people [unintelligible] four years is about [laughter]...

PA: Yeah, well, you know,...

SY: ...the limit.

PA: ...if someone had said to me in 1969, "Well, you'll still be here in September of 1973," I'd have told them they had rocks in their head.

SY: Right.

PA: And I think four years is just about the right time. I feel as though I have given four years of service to my country and to my First Family. And I've gained so much in that four years.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But, I like, you know, something that seems like a whole. Four years, to me, seems like a whole.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: That feels good, four years, you know. Three and a half wouldn't have [laughter] felt quite so good. But, so I hope to spend a little more time with my husband and a little more time in my community, because I really have had no time to get involved in my own community, which is a very active community. And I would like very much to do that. And, another thing is that I do feel that the whole approach here, on the East side, is becoming a more low key approach. First of all, Julie has gotten a full time job at Curtis Publishing Company, and I know she continues to do some engagements, but certainly she will be curtailed to a degree. Tricia is very happily settled up there in New York, and I don't think she, she hasn't...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...done that much during the Summer. I don't think she plans on doing it. And Mrs. Nixon, from what I gather, is planning on doing events here, in the Washington area, and in the [White] House, but not so much out of the Washington area. And when she does do them, for instance the trip to Europe that's being talked about, she will be traveling with the President. Which means that his staff will do the, the advance work and will set up everything [unintelligible]. One thing I'd been looking forward to was the possible trip to Finland, which was supposed to happen this month, I believe, but it is not going to happen now. I had, since that was going to be a First Lady's trip, I had hoped that maybe I would at least get to advance it, like I did the African trip.

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: But it hasn't come to pass. So that's one thing I was kind of waiting for that never happened. And also, we had gotten word when Connie left, in March or April, that Julie was going to come down and work out of this office, and be staff director for her mother. And I had told Connie when she left, and when we were discussing what was going to evolve here, that I thought I would stick around until at least June and see what did develop, because I had thought it would be an absolute marvelous experience...

SY: Oh, yes.

PA: ...to work that closely with Julie, to be right across, in the hall from her, in the same suite of rooms. And bat around ideas and, you know, because she's a terribly enthusiastic person. I was really looking forward to that. I'd also gotten word that Mrs. Nixon probably would be working down here, closer with the staff than she had in the past, but I guess with their heavy schedules and so forth that this really has not happened. And I don't really foresee, at this point, that it's going to. So that's why I was kind of, I've had it...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...in the back of my mind for awhile. And because of the Watergate too. I didn't want anybody to misinterpret why I was leaving, that I was being disloyal, or anything like this. And frankly I hope the Watergate thing has peaked and that it's now, you know, it's not over, but I hope that, as the President says, "For getting on with the more important things." And that my leaving won't be misinterpreted.

SY: Hm hmm.

[Phone rings]

PA: Excuse me a minute [unintelligible]. [Talking on phone] Hello, Penny Adams. Hi! [Tape recorder turned off]

[Recording resumed]

SY: [Is there anything] I haven't covered that you would like to add?

PA: I can't think of anything at the moment.

SY: O.K. Well, do you have a permanent address that you could give me where....

PA: Yes. 5433 Fallriver (that's one word)...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...Row (R-O-W)...

SY: Hm hmm.

PA: ...Court [laughter]. Would you believe? Columbia, Maryland 21044.

SY: O.K. All right. Well, as I said, it's probably going to be some time before you see a transcript of this [laughter].

PA: Oh, that's all right.

SY: But,...

PA: You know what I should have done?

SY: ...we will keep your....

PA: I have a tape recorder.

[End of recording]

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conducted by Susan Yowell
in the East Wing of the White House
on September 26, 1973

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