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Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History interview
Subject: Benjamin "Ben" Guterman
Interviewer: Eric Rhodes
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MR. BENJAMIN GUTERMAN: I sent you some material that was helpful to me to remember some of the things that we were working on.

MR. RHODES: I appreciated that. So this is December 11, 2015, around 12:00pm noon and I'm here in Olney, Maryland, with Ben. Ben, could you state your full name and spell it out for posterity?

MR. GUTERMAN: Okay. Formally, Benjamin Guterman. Last name G-U-T-E-R-M-A-N.

MR. RHODES: Great. I'm Eric Rhodes, E-R-I-C R-H-O-D-E-S. I'm an intern at the History Office with Jessie Kratz, and we're here to do an oral history of Benjamin's time at the National Archives. So usually what we'll do is kind of stick to a bit of a chronology. So if you wouldn't mind telling us a bit about where you were born, and what that was like—your childhood.

MR. GUTERMAN: I was actually born in Italy, and my parents were refugees after World War II. I came here with them when I was the age of about three. They were assigned to live in San Francisco, so I grew up there, pretty much, until 1987. I had graduated from San Francisco State, with an M.A., and applied to the University of Maryland at College Park, Maryland. That was my reason for coming out here to a doctoral program, in 1987. So I skipped over quite a bit there.

But San Francisco was very formative for me culturally, politically, and educationally.

So, I came here to Maryland, and during the grad program in history, was able to get an internship, kind of, at the Archives. They called it an intermittent program at the time, where you would work part time. Quite a few students from the University of Maryland did that at the time, so that was good. Over the course of three or four years, I was able to move into a permanent position part-time, and eventually full-time, so I appreciate that. It was a way to do grad studies, and learn about the Archives, and work at the Archives at the same time, and to emerge into a career, because it was hard to employ one's history background at that time, and I think it still is, so I'm very grateful for the opportunity.

MR. RHODES: Going back to, you're three years old and in San Francisco, what are your memories of San Francisco at that time, and when was this?

MR. GUTERMAN: This would be as a child from the mid…as far as my memories go, from my earliest memories would be the late '50s, when I was around ten years old, and some of the neighborhoods there were very colorful because there was a Jewish neighborhood, really European immigrants, and it's very colorful. A lot of stores that would cater to that clientele, or that ethnic group. So I have some memories of the kind of unique butcher shops, bakeries, things like that. Those neighborhoods changed over the years, and we moved to different parts of the city. It's quite a dynamic city, as different races and ethnicities came in, and it became a heavily Chinese and Japanese city as well. Economically, it changed quite a bit with the high tech boom. I'm racing through quite a few things, but it's a very dynamic place. And very exciting and innovative in many ways.

MR. RHODES: What was your schooling like? When you were in, you know, say middle school, was there, did you, did you have a penchant for history?

MR. GUTERMAN: I recall that I, I had an interest in reading, in books quite a bit. As a kid I think I had wide ranging interests. I liked, I liked science fiction. I liked history. That was not the major thing at that point, but I liked stories about people. I remember reading about sort of fictional stories about children in China Town at that point, and that, that kind of was fascinating to me how people who grew up in a different culture. Different traditions, creating different mindsets, and how they thought differently, and so I was intrigued by that. But I was also, I also grew up, I think, through high school thinking that I was going to go into science. I was very interested in biology and zoology, and maybe underwater sea, oceanography, things like that.

MR. RHODES: What informed that, would you say?

MR. GUTERMAN: Science was intriguing, and it was kind of dynamic. Maybe I had some really good science teachers in junior high and high school that I recall who inspired us. I think biology, going through junior college, is where I thought I was going to go, to study biology. But I think I didn't do that well in some of the practical exams, where they stick pins in creatures all around the room, and you have to identify the organs. I don't think I did too well in that, so I kind of fell back to history. That was good.

MR. RHODES: Yeah. But those Cousteau films are fantastic, aren't they?

MR. GUTERMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm fascinated.

MR. RHODES: Of course, one can approach them historically. That's the beauty of history, I think.

MR. GUTERMAN: Yeah, it touches everything.

MR. RHODES: I guess you went to high school in San Francisco?

MR. GUTERMAN: Yeah.

MR. RHODES: Which high school?

MR. GUTERMAN: Lowell High School. I was fortunate to get into that school because it was a college prep school. You had to have a pretty good GPA to get in. I guess it was not highly selective, but it was a notch above the other high schools, in that the teachers had a better class of students to work with, better prepared, and they could teach to them, and give them more challenging stuff, and more activities. I think that school is still in existence, and has been around since the 1890s or early 1900s.

MR. RHODES: Wow. So you made the decision then to attend San Francisco State, and this must have been in the 1970s?

MR. GUTERMAN: Around '68. I actually went to City College of San Francisco, which is a two year school, and then transferred to San Francisco State.

MR. RHODES: Could you talk about a little bit about the milieu, and your involvement with it in San Francisco in 1968?

MR. GUTERMAN: [Laughter].

MR. RHODES: I mean, how can we not talk a little bit about that?

MR. GUTERMAN: Yeah, I think about that sometimes. I was pretty young, and the whole counterculture movement was coming along, and overwhelming everybody. I remember visiting the Haight-Ashbury, and just a lot of colorful people in costumes, and it was a real cultural revolution, and just the excitement and music and ideas. You couldn't really go down the Haight very easily. There were thousands of tourists, and they had to reroute the bus lines along that street because the buses couldn't navigate. There were just a lot of people gawking. So it was an exciting time. I didn't get involved that heavily in the counterculture. I was surely influenced by it, in terms of thinking, and ideas, and the anti-war movement eventually, and the literature. I had friends whose parents were distraught because a couple of those friends sort of disappeared into that culture, and who knows what happened to them. But it was fascinating. But also the city, of course, has a real innovative and liberal spirit about it. People are very open and creative in every way, and I think I was always attracted to that. In San Francisco State, we had classes that were devoted to the literature of the counterculture movement. The new poetry, the new novels. So they tried to adapt to that, and dig into it.

MR. RHODES: Did you enter Junior College or San Francisco State knowing that you were going to do history specifically, or you talk about literature a lot, so did you have a wider focus in the humanities? What were your intellectual kind of attractions?

MR. GUTERMAN: When I started junior college, at City College of San Francisco, I was most attracted to biology. But I did really enjoy my literature classes. I had several interests. I can recall we had some good instructors at that junior college, who really excited us about literature, and about science. But also I can recall anthropology. That was a real eye-opener for me because the premise of anthropology is that you become immersed in another culture. We had a teacher named Mr. Manlove, of all things, Manlove symbolizing loving mankind. Anyway, he did his research in the Philippines with a primitive tribe. That was very fascinating to me. So, while I was loving science and such things as organic chemistry and biology, and advanced calculus—I mean that was fascinating to me—I wasn't the best, but it fascinated me. I was also fascinated by the softer sciences, I guess you could say, like anthropology. And literature, just studying, we read case studies, studies of the Cheyenne Indians, who were people who went and lived with tribes and studied their culture, their language, their traditions. So, I think I was a real student in that I was fascinated by it all. That's what college is about.

MR. RHODES: You transferred to San Francisco State, and what was your degree?

MR. GUTERMAN: Eventually at San Francisco State I had a B.A. in History.

MR. RHODES: Did you have a specific topic for your thesis?

MR. GUTERMAN: No, there was no thesis at the B.A. level, but it was American History pretty much.

MR. RHODES: Alright, so you land at…early 1970s, you graduated from college. What did you do after that?

MR. GUTERMAN: Well, I actually stayed at San Francisco State and got a teaching credential. I wanted to teach.

MR. RHODES: This is a common thread throughout many of the people I've spoken to.

MR. GUTERMAN: [Laughter]. Yeah. Well, that's what I thought I wanted to do, teach high school or junior high, something like that, so I got a California teaching credential. Didn't have any luck at that point.

I did land a job at a boys' home about 60 miles north of San Francisco, and I actually lived in the home. I was the teacher. These kids were wards of the court and they lived there. We had about six counselors who helped with all the other duties. I had a little schoolhouse on the premises, which was pretty rough because some of these kids were emotionally disturbed, and they were all ages from 10 through 18, all in the same room. I had to devise all kinds of lesson plans for them. It was quite a scene, but you do the best you can. Some of these kids were eventually farmed out, or placed in Special Ed courses in public schools. But it was good experience. I did that for about two to three years.

And then I worked in the private sector, in miscellaneous jobs. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Sales jobs, things like that. Then, I decided I had to really follow what I wanted to do and I reapplied to the M.A. program at State in History.

MR. RHODES: OK, so that would have been the mid-'70s by then?

MR. GUTERMAN: There was a gap in time where I was working at private businesses at that point, about 1984 or so when I applied for the M.A.

MR. RHODES: And what was different at that point, going back to the Master's degree at State?

MR. GUTERMAN: Some of the same professors were still there, so it was really nice to see them again. But I think, like anybody else, I was more mature, so I got more out of the courses. I was able to participate more effectively in discussions, and get more from the readings, and took it more seriously. It was more rewarding.

MR. RHODES: I had a point in my education as a history student in which I had that leap from realizing that history isn't just reading narratives about the past. It's constructing narratives from sometimes seemingly disparate artifacts, and things like this, which is where my appreciation for archives has come in. Did you start to understand history in any different type of way, when you went back for your Master's?

MR. GUTERMAN: Well, I think my interests at that point, I think I knew very little about the Archives. I think I approached history in a traditional sense, looking at documents, newspapers, photos, things like that. So, for me, it was trying to learn the traditional skills of research and writing. But I did notice that I was more drawn toward cultural history and social history, and that was the big thing at that point, social history. It was transforming the profession, like statistical history, you're learning about groups, and interaction with groups, and political history was suffering—people associated with the Vietnam War, repression, and things like that, so political history was on the decline. I think that carried over from my earliest college days, I just loved studying about people and social problems and issues.

I recall a class on Venice, and we had to write a paper, I think I wrote on the racial makeup of Venice in the 1500s to 1600s, as best I could from documents. We had a rare collection at San Francisco State on European prints and documents, so I was able to do a little bit there. But that's where I tended, more on social history, like a lot of people.

MR. RHODES: Were you inspired by Shakespeare, for example, to undertake that?

MR. GUTERMAN: I always liked Shakespeare. I never delved into him too deeply. But I've since been doing a lot of Shakespeare. Sure, I did enjoy all eras of history, especially the Renaissance, and I'm reading Greek philosophy. That was always pretty incredible, too. So I was a master of none and a student of all.

MR. RHODES: I think I strive to be a generalist as well. It's a great way to be, especially in the Archives. I realize we skipped over something that you had mentioned, the anti-war movement. Is that something you want to speak a little bit about?

MR. GUTERMAN: Yeah, I was never too heavily involved, but to a degree. I remember participating in a march. There must've been 150,000 people marching from downtown out to an area that I lived. It was called the Polo Grounds, a big open field, and so I was a part of that march in something like early 1970s. When you come over the hill and you see this massive crowd, there's nothing like it. It's one of those great experiences that stick with you. And of course, there was music in Golden Gate Park, which is a mecca. There were free concerts by the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane and all these people that I could go to. There was the hippie movement. I happened to be there sometimes when there was a confrontation with the police, and saw a little bit of police brutality against people who were stoned, or not behaving well, maybe taking off their clothes, things like that. There were a lot of things. I remember the Cambodian invasion took place during the Nixon Administration, while I was at San Francisco State, and there were demonstrations on campus, thousands of students. They had to close school for a day or two, and I remember the hundreds of police were there around the Commons. They just circled a big area, so it was very intimidating, and that was about the time of maybe Kent State, where fellow students were killed on those campuses, and Jackson State. So it was a revolutionary time, and it inspired a lot of students, and was very disruptive. But those were the kinds of things that stay with you, and they teach you a lot about government, about politics, and make you kind of pessimistic. That's how it was for me, and there were probably other cases, other instances I can't recall right now. There were some instructors who sympathized, others who did not. I came right after President Hayakawa as the President of San Francisco State, and he I think came down pretty hard on students. That was just before I transferred to State, about '68. So I remember him. That's about all I remember on that at the moment.

MR. RHODES: Did you have a sense, do you remember, just that you're in sort of, that this would be, like for, in that march for example, did you have a sense that this might be in an archive, that this might be part of history in the future, or as someone who's an historian, or a hopeful one?

MR. GUTERMAN: I didn't think about that.

MR. RHODES: No.

MR. GUTERMAN: I didn't think about that. I just thought this was a very tumultuous time, and I was, I was very sympathetic but a little bit on the hesitant side, like, like some people, I guess, I was concerned about the, to what degree I would get involved. I was concerned about my safety. I didn't want to get hurt. So I was involved but not in an extreme way. I remember, of course at that point, just before that it was People's Park Movement thing at Berkley just across the Bay and Mario Savio was the leader of that and I remember reading a lot about him, and he, he in the subsequent years came to San Francisco State and as a student in science, I believe. So we were, we were reading about these things, we were following it, and we were, it was very divisive. But I think we were living in the present pretty much.

MR. RHODES: Okay, so, so, sorry, you're back. It's 1984 or so and you're in the Master's program. You wrote a, did you write a thesis for your Master's?

MR. GUTERMAN: Uh, no [phonetic].

MR. RHODES: Or, or do you have a particular, again, sorry, you said it was social, cultural history.

MR. GUTERMAN: Right.

MR. RHODES: How did you decide you wanted to go to Maryland, and specifically to study what?

MR. GUTERMAN: I got the M.A. at State, and at that point, I think I decided that I wanted to teach college, and to have a better rate of success, you need to get a doctorate. So, it was a question at that point, my fellow students at the M.A. program said, "No, this is it, I can't undertake the doctoral program because you're going to face about seven years of study and probably poverty as well. I had a family, I already had my oldest son at that point, a wife and son, when I graduated with my M.A. in 1987. When talking with fellow grad students, I was one of the few, I think, who wanted to go on. I applied to UCLA and to Maryland. We came to Maryland for a couple reasons. My wife's parents were here, and that could be some support. Also, Maryland had a very strong Colonial America, American, Early American program, and that was my major interest at that point. It was very good, very strong, with some good people, and that's why we came here—

MR. RHODES: You said that there was an intermittent program where you'd work. Where did you work? This would've been around the time of the building of Archives II?

MR. GUTERMAN: Earlier. Earlier. I don't have the exact year in my mind, at the beginning. I think it was probably in the late 90s, mid-90s. I started at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. about 1991, as an intermittent, maybe my third or fourth year at Maryland.

MR. RHODES: What did you undertake as an intermittent?

MR. GUTERMAN: I worked in the research rooms, in Room 203, which is the primary Textual Research Room where documents were brought in. A lot of people would research all sorts of documents, including military records and pension records at that point. They alternated us to work upstairs in Room 400, which is where my last office was, that was the Microfilm Reading Room. That room, where I worked for my last ten or 15 years, was actually where I had started at the Archives. It was a huge room, with very high ceilings and thousands and thousands of microfilm rolls. All the microfilms were there, even the ones that are now in College Park. Everything was at Archives I. I would help people find the right microfilm, whether it be census, immigration, military records, or Indian records. It was a great education into the microfilm holdings of the Archives. For many researchers, microfilm was essential because a lot of records had been filmed, and they wouldn't give you the original documents. You had to read it on microfilm.

It really got busy around the time of the release of the census. I can remember the 1920 Census, there were lines out the door and you had to take a number or get your name on a list, and they would allow you an hour or two inside, and then they would have to get somebody else in there. So it was extremely busy. This was all before ancestry.com, and before you could do online research.

MR. RHODES: Can you talk about how that works before ancestry.com? How did you index things? Somebody comes in and says they want this census, what do you have to go through to help them?

MR. GUTERMAN: I should talk about microfilm because I was heavily involved with microfilm after I left that unit. While I was in that unit in the early 1990s, and microfilm had been undertaken by the Archives since the 1940s. It was a way to preserve records, preserve facsimiles of them in perfect series order. They would film it as the records were organized, an entire series or a group of series, and you would have a microfilm publication. A publication might be the 1920 Census for the State of New York, so that would be one number, like M100. It was assigned a number. Then, M101 would be the State of Pennsylvania, so it was very organized by numbers and titles. But also, the microfilm program was designed to provide access so they wouldn't have to pull the records. That preservation and access technology went from the 1940s up to the late 1990s, when digitization took its place.

Anyway, it was a great education in the Microfilm Research Room because we had to learn how these films were organized, where they were, and how people could get access to them. We had a pretty good-sized desk, where four or five interns sat, and people would come up and say "I've got this problem, I'm trying to locate an ancestor in the 1920 Census, who lived in Pennsylvania, and I don't know the county." Of course, the census is critical because it lists your entire family and their ages and where they came from, and in some cases, their assets or their work title. It's incredible. So we learned how to help them find the right roll, and there were indexes as well, and most of them were on film. First, you'd go to a film index and take down certain numbers. Then, you'd go to the actual film of the census. So that was census.

Then, of course there were Indian records, which are very complicated. There are State Department records, Treasury, Legislative records, you name it. Again, it was a great education over the course of four or five years, to learn what we had, what it contained, and how to access them, and that helped me quite a bit.

MR. RHODES: At what point in the 1990s did you start to use, firstly, computers in the aid of doing this kind of work, and secondly when did the Internet come to Room 400?

MR. GUTERMAN: I think it came later. I can't give you an exact date. I would say it was probably in the early 2000s. It started with only a few computers, and they might have the information on a CD, so you would check out that CD, go over to a computer and put it in. They didn't have the information programmed in the computer or hardwired to an outside mainframe or something, that way at the beginning. You would have to check out the CD. But I think it gradually built up, and even today it's not entirely computerized. The Microfilm Research Room has shrunken quite a bit. It's in a different location, but they still have the films, and some of the things you'd do, you would use ancestry.com and fold3.com. Those were the two private firms that have digitized, scanned a lot of microfilm. You can use those resources free at the Archives if you come in. I think that's true of any Archives or regional facility, whereas if you're at home, you have to subscribe. It's a great resource.

I think computerization took a little longer to hit the Research Room. I should say another thing that really revolutionized genealogy, and a lot of people have talked about this, is the phenomena of the TV program Roots. Before that, not as many people were doing genealogy. Roots was such a big thing, especially for African-American genealogy, that we had thousands and thousands more people coming to the Archives nationwide to do their family research. It was a big turning point.

MR. RHODES: And this was when?

MR. GUTERMAN: I think it must have been in the late '70s. I can't give you the exact date.

MR. RHODES: So throughout the 1990s, you were in the Microfilm Room?

MR. GUTERMAN: Until about 1995. Then, I applied for a permanent job with the General Unit, where I stayed from about 1995 to 2015.

MR. RHODES: You got your dissertation in 1995, is that right?

MR. GUTERMAN: No, end of 1994.

MR. RHODES: So you must've made the decision that you were not going to teach, you wanted to stay at the Archives, is that right?

MR. GUTERMAN: Well, I never told anybody at the Archives, but I guess I can go on record now—I still had the hope that I would teach college through the 1990s, and I was applying, but I didn't have any luck. I was an adjunct, I did teach a summer course at the University of Maryland, and also three or four classes at George Mason University. That was phenomenal because they were grad courses. Only one was an undergrad course, so for me as a non-positioned professor, instructor, to be able to move in and teach a grad course was great because I could speak to students who were more motivated, and I could deal with more penetrating and interesting material. So that was great. I still hoped to teach college throughout maybe the late 1990s, but I gradually kind of gave up on that. Also, I didn't want to relocate. Who knows where you're going to go if you land a teaching position. And, to be honest, I think the Archives pays more. It's not an easy life as a college instructor. Good and bad points. And I was enjoying my work at the Archives. I felt I was doing some interesting things, and making a contribution.

I think it was 1996 when I moved into the position that I was to hold for the rest of my time at NARA, which was as a writer-editor. The unit was probably reorganized. The Archives went through about two or three reorganizations during my time there, so the office title and acronym changed.

MR. RHODES: From?

MR. GUTERMAN: I'm trying to remember. An earlier one was NWCD. NW was Records Management, so we were, in a sense, part of the whole Records, Holding and Records Branch, which was an odd fit for an editorial and publishing unit. But we published a lot of their books and things. So it was NWCD, and I've forgotten some of the other ones, but the last was SCP, part of Communications, which was probably a better fit in some ways.

MR. RHODES: Did Communications exist before, for public outreach and to promote the Archives and its mission?

MR. GUTERMAN: Right. I think in the late 1990s, early 2000s, there was a unit called NPOL, N Policy, under the Archivist. They did things like the all-out Archives communication, they formulated the Archives Strategic Plan, things like that.

So, in a reorganization, the administrators move the units around to however they feel the units can best serve their respective purpose, or their mission has changed, their concept of what the Archives should be doing, I assume.

MR. RHODES: Were you involved with…I guess you'd been working with Jim [Worsham] for a while. Was there anybody else that you worked with?

MR. GUTERMAN: Well Jim, I don't know the exact year, I think he came along in 2004, something like that. Before that, Mary Ryan was the Managing Editor. It was Mary, myself, and another writer-editor named Maureen MacDonald, and a previous woman who had resigned, or she'd left about 1996, 1997. So it was Mary and a couple of us producing *Prologue* until about 2004. Then, the administration decided they wanted to upgrade *Prologue*, and they brought in Jim as the overall editor. Then, the magazine was redesigned somewhat, and the content was changed. I remember originally, before the change, it was a documented journal, heavily footnoted. They did away with that, so at the end of the articles you would have a note that in a very general sense talked about the sources that were used. A more popular format.

MR. RHODES: So it may have been a shift in targeted audience, from generally historians to the wider public?

MR. GUTERMAN: That's part of it, but I think they felt the articles were more readable and less distracting. They wanted to appeal to a wider audience, but they wanted to make it more readable, maybe shorten the articles a little bit. We still kept a lot of images, that's always been part of it. But I think that's part of a wider trend in government agencies. With the Internet, history became more available to a wider audience. That just really changed everything, so the change in *Prologue* is part of that larger trend toward making publications and historical facts and knowledge more accessible.

MR. RHODES: Can you talk about how the Internet changed things here, because you would've seen that. It would have been in transition when you entered, or no?

MR. GUTERMAN: Yeah. When I first started at my writer-editor position, I think that we had computers. This was 1996, definitely. We were editing things online, of course. We could do that, and were using word processing program. We used WordPerfect rather than Word. But where I noticed major changes in *Prologue* work, when we tried to get images, it was all done mostly through physical research, going to the Library of Congress, going to the Still Pictures Branch at College Park, and we still do that. If we had to find a really rare photo, we had reference books that listed historical societies or museums across the country. And if we suspected that they might have a picture of some civil rights topic, or a certain politician, we would call them or write them and do a search the old-fashioned way via fax or e-mail. But gradually, as more and more stuff was put online, that really changed the way I did photo research. I could find images instantaneously on the Library of Congress website, which had a really good photo resource, better than the Archives. Also, historical societies started to scan their photos, so it really sped things up. It made more available, and we had better luck in finding things, we found a wider variety of things. That's speaking of images and documents. It just made for even richer depictions in the articles. It made the work easier in many ways, but also gave us more choices, too. It was a really rich supply of materials, and we could be a lot more efficient. It was great. And that's accelerating all the time because just in my last few weeks, I noticed the Naval Historical Society, when you want images of ships or sailors throughout American history, they always had thumbnails online, but just in the last two or three months, the Naval Historical Society had gotten funding and upgraded their system and they're making available high-resolution images. So you don't have to tell them what you want and wait for them to send you a scan. It's downloadable. They're behind the curve but they've come around. So that's the kind of thing that's happening. It makes it very quick.

MR. RHODES: The Archives, along with, I believe it was the University of Maryland sort of defined the modern iteration of the profession of archivism, like to be an archivist, right? They helped to create that. And so how do you think that the Internet is affecting the profession of archivists?

MR. GUTERMAN: I can speak only from my work with archivists because I was not one. But certainly, they would find their finding aids, their guides to records are online. And these are not the same guides as before. Previously, you'd go to a book, and it was organized by topic and subtopic. But now, you go to the online catalogue, OPA [Online Public Access] as it's called now, and you put in keywords, and it brings up everything. So the results that you work with are different, and you have to change your mind set about how you use those results, and before that, how you access the records. So I think that's changed archival reference work.

I'll just say that this is on a different track, the budgetary problems in not having as much as many archivists means that in the last few years archivists have not been able to write as much or produce guides to records.

They've pretty much been designated as reference people. They would serve the researchers. Whereas, previously they used to have some time to put together guides, let's say such as the Vietnam War records, the records of the Civil War Treasury, for example, they can't really do that anymore. That's a budgetary problem. But it's also something that affected me as an editor. The Archives Institute of Policy really went away from printed guides, in favor of this database Guide to Records. So we weren't producing printed finding aids anymore. I don't know if that answers your question.

There's probably more to it, how it changed archivists. Yes, I think it probably sped up a lot of the communications they had with people, in terms of email and sending them scans of documents, things like that. It's just revolutionized communications.

MR. RHODES: Well, you started off in your post-baccalaureate education thinking about teaching. At what point did you become aware of this field of federal history you've been very involved with.

MR. GUTERMAN: I try not to mix that too much with my archives work.

MR. RHODES: But maybe you can speak about the importance of federal history?

MR. GUTERMAN: Yes. There are two aspects to the term "federal history," the history of the federal government, of course, and also the work being done in federal agencies on history. See what I mean? It's a vague term. But at some point, I just wanted to join an organization, and there is one in DC called the Society for History in a Federal Government. It was a way to meet people doing similar work and related work in other agencies. I've been involved with them, and it's a very good thing because you meet archivists, let's say, at the Library of Congress. You meet editors at the State Department. You meet historians at the Army Center of Military History. And all these people who are fascinating to meet. They do their work differently, just by virtue of their different missions, the different records that they have there, the different goals of their leaders. So isn't that incredible, it enriches you because you see different possibilities for doing your job. You learn from them, and it teaches you a lot about other agencies, what they do and how they do their history. And it's not always good. Some of them are not doing great history, but it's interesting. It's a wider world, essentially. I guess, not to go into it too deeply, I felt that the inner world at the Archives was not enough for me. It's kind of limiting. But that's not to say I didn't do a great job at the Archives.

MR. RHODES: Not by any means.

MR. GUTERMAN: But whatever. I felt I had to be part of a larger group. And there are a fair number of people at the Archives who are part of this organization as well, and some of them have been presidents of the organization. The Archives was a partner with them for many years, allowing the society to hold conferences and other events at the Archives. The connection is that all these agencies, of course, have to retire their records to the Archives. That's what makes the Archives unique. It is the center of the universe in a way. So you learn by studying these other agencies. You learn about what records they have, how they're organized, what format they're in, when they turn them over, when some delinquent agencies turn their records over late or not at all. It's a very interesting picture, and it's all tied together. It enriched my work as an editor. But I just want to say it because when I edit books by other units, or guides to records from other units at the Archives, my having a larger view of the way these records originate, what they contain, and where they ended up, that informs my editing. It can't help but inform my editing. I'm not just doing grammatical work. I may, at times, point out to somebody, "Well, you could phrase this differently, with regard to the origin of the records to make it more accurate." So, inevitably, a wider view, more experience informs your reading of something.

MR. RHODES: Did you have particular accomplishments at the National Archives that you're exceedingly proud of?

MR. GUTERMAN: I think about that sometimes, and I'm just going to go off the top of my head, it's like anything else, you have to maybe pick out something that comes first to your mind, but of course, *Prologue*. I worked on that for almost 20 years as a photo editor, and then tried to really enrich the text visually. It's a package that I put together and got some good feedback along the way. I really was very conscientious about it, and dug very deeply into a lot of sources. It was not just the pictures, it was also the captions. I think a lot of people don't read the article, they just look at the pictures and the captions, so it's important. And the covers, I was very involved in selecting and suggesting covers. It was a very exciting experience because it allowed me to dig into a lot of different sources, not just the Archives. Primarily, first you go to the Archives, and then you go elsewhere. So I can just say I had the opportunity sometimes to visit with archivists at College Park or elsewhere, and go in the stacks with them, and look at specific documents, or look at images. Sometimes, there are photos in the textural records, not just still pictures, but there are photos, and maps, and things like that. I get my hands on some of these things, and make it a greater, richer selection of the images, and then find some rare images outside the Archives. Sometimes, even small historical societies, or even families who had pictures of their Confederate relatives—these things are not public, and publishing them for the first time, getting permission, it's amazing. There are so many stories. Each article has its own story and its own fascination, so I can't go into all of that right now, but it was an adventure, amazing.

MR. RHODES: I would like if you could talk about the creative process. How does the finished product come out of that?

MR. GUTERMAN: I think everybody has their own approach, like Maureen, my co-worker for many years before she left *Prologue* four or five years ago. But my approach was to read the article, jot down important people, places, and events, and then I had to think about telling that story, what would be important to picture. And we knew that we could fit in only maybe anywhere from six to ten illustrations. So you try to get a balance between the photos and documents because we want to promote documents. The whole point of *Prologue* is to promote what resources we have, and what they

can yield, and documents were a major part of that. So you brainstorm a list, and then you go after that. Then, I always tried to involve the author because, let's say I got it wrong, and that author's priorities were different. So, once I developed the list, I would run it by the author, and he or she might make some changes, and once we had our list, we went after those photos, wherever they might be. But the Archive's resources were first, and then if they didn't hold them, we went elsewhere. Every story is unique, every story has unique demands and problems of access, information, and costs, and you have to watch your costs. So there are pressures. There are deadlines, and nobody wants to hear any apologies, so you get it done somehow. You develop a system, you become efficient, and we did have a little help. Sometimes, authors would actually have done the research already, and had some citations of images at College Park. They already had good scans, maybe, or good photocopies of some of these documents in the early days. They had citations to the documents, folders, and box numbers. That helped a lot, and I would lean on archivists to help me find some of this stuff, and gave them credit and a free issue, and it usually worked out.

MR. RHODES: That's great.

MR. GUTERMAN: I'm very thankful that I got to learn about so many different kinds of records from military, Native American, immigration, Supreme Court, you name it. It was all over the place, yes. Also, it's astounding the range of stories that the records can tell from the very personal stories that the people submitted, strictly about their family, that's all. No further. To stories about the highest levels of the international diplomacy, the range of stories that are contained in the records is amazing. And that's what *Prologue* was about, revealing the possibilities, you know, and showing what could be done. And I hope that that continues because to me it's a very important product, and it has changed. In the early years, when *Prologue* was founded, I'll just say this, it was conceived of by the early archivists as a scholarly publication. It would promote knowledge and research. But of course, over time it continued to promote research, but also dissemination of stories and history to a more popular audience as well.

MR. RHODES: Were there any sort of controversies during your time at NARA? And how did you contribute to resolving, or weren't able to resolve those controversies? Or were things insurmountable?

MR. GUTERMAN: I really don't think I was involved in too many controversies. I think other people were. I don't think I was. I was too low on the pole, I just did my job. I was involved maybe in editing certain reports that were sensitive, just to that extent. I don't think I can help you too much. The controversies were usually handled by the Communications Office. We didn't really see much. In other words, where you have something like the Clinton emails, and the handling of emails, and the State Department was supposed to turn things over, or you're supposed to preserve them in certain ways, certain procedures laid out by NARA, the State Department maybe didn't follow those procedures. Those kinds of things are handled by Communications. Our unit maybe edited a memo or a bulletin relating to that. That's about it.

MR. RHODES: Anything else that you'd like to add? Anecdotes? Really, the time is yours.

MR. GUTERMAN: Well, I just want to on the record to say that *Prologue* was just one part of the products that I worked with. Actually, the original name of our unit was the Product Developments Staff. We produced books, guides that were written by other people in other parts of the agency. We produced guides, museum catalogues. They were produced by the Exhibit Branch, and we edited those. So we were involved in products, and so I just wanted to say for the record that I worked on a lot of

different products. One important category was finding aids, information leaflets that went out to the public, brochures, flyers, posters, slides in the more recent years. I'm trying to think of what else.

Oh, this is very important, it took a lot of my time, microfilm publications. About in 1998, I became the chief editor of Microfilm Publications for the agency. I'd already become an editor, and the woman who was doing that was retiring, so we produced a few dozen microfilm publications a year at the height of the program, and I would be the editor of the historical introductions that somebody else would write, giving the background of the records and how to use them. So if you go through some of these microfilm publications, the introductions are in a booklet that accompanies each one, and also on the first roll of the file. Actually, it should be on every roll of the film. So I got involved in a lot of history, and weighed in on the accuracy and the readability of those introductions. So that was a heavy part of my workload, working with microfilm publications until they were sort of phased out around 2010, 2012, in that area.

Another enjoyable area for me was finding aids, and things like that. These were printed guides to records, while they were still doing it that way. An important one was a Guide to the Records of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Complex. In other words, this was a death camp. The archivist I worked with at College Park and another grad student to produce the guide. They went through all the records in the Archives that had information relating to this concentration camp, because the U.S. Army liberated that camp in May 1945. So records were generated by the Army, by the State Department, by Treasury, I think, but various branches of the Army, by general staff. There must've been about 28 different record groups. It's astounding, and it's a lot of work, and they went through and collated this. So this is a fascinating, highly focused finding aid, and really something should be done like that for every camp or every topic. There's not enough time, but to me it was fascinating, and so I was the editor on that. The great thing is that I got to pick the illustrations. I don't know if they intended to put them in, but I suggested it and I took the lead in that. We had images that we could find of the Commandants. A lot of stuff was captured, like the death books that were left behind that the Americans appropriated. Letters, images of the American troops coming in, probably like ten, or 14 images I think, made it into the book. So for me, that was a creative effort, something that I could use my judgment and my opinions as to what was important in producing some of the captions. It's an awful story, but you try to make it more important. You try to impress people with the importance. You just don't want it to be dry. I mean, history can't be neutral, in a sense. There's a moral imperative there. You try to show people how awful it was as well, and our records were very revealing there.

Another case was I was revising a Guide to POW Records held at the Presidential Libraries. People don't know that a lot of POW records, like a lot of POW negotiations and documentation, were generated by [Presidential] administrations. I'm sure there are other military records as well, but a lot of the POW records are in the Presidential Libraries. This was a guide of what's out there. So I was involved in surveying or communicating with Presidential Libraries, and getting the latest updated information on what they had. We revised that guide, and that was very revealing.

Another guide was on railroad records, you see, it's all over the place. What kind of railroad records do we have? I don't know; this wasn't just railroads. This was specifically cartographic railroad records, so maps and drawings specifically relating to railroads from the 1830s on. An archivist in Cartographic wrote it, and I was able to work with him on the photo selection. We put the images in the center of the spread so it would be more effective, not just a dedicated photo spread. We included an early drawing of one of the first railroads, just a sketch of the route between two cities. That kind of stuff just opens

your mind to what the Archives has. Also, it's the art of illustration, the art of composing a book. That's the whole other aspect that excited me in this job, how to create a product. See, it's not just editing, so those are some of the major products.

Others were more mundane, such as editing a notice or something like that, or a minor report or something that's very cut and dry. But I worked on some things that were very difficult to understand, a lot of legalese, such as Records Management brochures, booklets, and reports, and I tried to introduce some plain language in there. That's a whole different line of work. I just want to say that the work covered a wide spectrum...exhibit catalogues, working with the curators who wrote them and trying to help them improve their writing. They did the major part of the work, but I contributed to that, and to the signs and the captions that are in the Exhibit Hall. I could go on and on, but I have to look at my list.

MR. RHODES: Thank you very much, Ben.

MR. GUTERMAN: You're welcome. It's amazing. Great. I appreciate the opportunity.

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