

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview
Subject: Alan C. Lowe
Interviewer: Jack Kabrel
Date: June 15, 2016

PART 1 [START RECORDING]

MR. JACK KABREL: This is Jack Kabrel. Today is June 16, 2016, at 1:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. I am conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Alan C. Lowe, via an audio recording. This interview is part of the National Archives and Record Administration's History Office Oral History Project. Welcome, and thank you for doing this interview, Alan, and we appreciate your time and your history.

MR. ALAN C LOWE: You're very welcome. I've been looking forward to doing this, and I appreciate being part of it.

MR. KABREL: And I just want to say here, before we get into the interview, that reading through your resume, it's indeed an honor to be able to interview you, because you represent every reason why I came into the National Archives; because of the history, and the love of history, and your track rising up from an archivist in the Reagan Library to what you've become now, what you're becoming even further on is truly admirable, and something that I think this interview will show to people. That's kind of what I want to take out of this, is to show how you can come up from that position as an archivist, all the way up to who you've become now. And thank you very much for this opportunity.

MR. LOWE: Well, thank you. I appreciate those kind words, and it has definitely been a pleasure and honor, so I'm glad to talk about it.

MR. KABREL: Great. Can you just give us a brief, in a few minutes, an overview, the arc of your career with the National Archives?

MR. LOWE: Sure. I began as an archivist, as you said, at the Reagan Library in California in 1989. I just finished getting my master's degree in history at the University of Kentucky, and started at Reagan, if I remember correctly, in September of '89. They just moved the materials out there earlier that year, and the temporary facility there in Los Angeles, prior to the completion of the permanent facility up in Simi Valley. So, I was there from '89, up until January of '92, and I, at that point, had the opportunity to come back to be part of the Central Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives; first of all, in Washington, D.C., then in my later years, we were at College Park. So, I started there in January of '92 and ended up serving Central Office until, I believe, January of 2003.

So, there's almost exactly 11 years there in Washington and College Park. For part of that time, I also served for just under a year as acting director of the FDR Library up in Hyde Park. We were between directors, and they needed someone to help oversee it in that interim, and asked me to go do it, which

was a really interesting experience. Now, I left the National Archives in 2003 to become the founding executive director of the Howard Baker Center at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. I never thought I'd leave NARA, but that was a great opportunity to start up a center, and to work with Howard Baker, which turned out to be a phenomenal experience. Again, I never thought I'd leave Howard Baker, and then I got the call about the Bush Museum, I think it was about late '08, December of '08—and throughout a two-week period went through a series of interviews and was asked to be the director of the Bush Library, and came back to NARA again in April of '09, and where I am now until just a couple weeks from now, when I go up to be the director of the Abraham Lincoln Library up in Illinois. That's my career, in a nutshell.

MR. KABREL: A remarkable career.

MR. LOWE: Well, I've been very fortunate. I told the historians, too, that when I started at Reagan, I didn't know a whole lot about the National Archives. I certainly knew even less, frankly, about presidential libraries. I had, like I said, just finished my master's degree at Kentucky, and wasn't sure what to do next. I thought about going for my doctorate, but I put a resume out, and one of the places I put it out to was the National Archives. And I got a call back one day and it was a guy interviewing me for an archivist job at Reagan—Rod Soubers, who later would become my supervisor there. We spoke for about a half an hour. At the end of the call, he said, "Tell me about why you want to work at a presidential library." And I said, "It's been my lifelong dream to work at one of the presidential libraries." And he said, "Fantastic." And essentially, at that point, he said, "Report out here in September."

It was a little bit of a different process back then. And I said, "Fantastic." And I hung up the phone, and said out loud, "What the hell is a presidential library?" I didn't even know what they were at that point. I just agreed to do something. But I knew about the National Archives, obviously, and I knew it sounded like an amazing opportunity. So, about a month and a half later, we were in L.A. and I grew to really, really love the presidential libraries, and the Archives, what they're all about.

MR. KABREL: That's really interesting that in some ways, you kind of fell into it, right?

MR. LOWE: I did. I absolutely did, yeah. Like I said, I might go and get my doctorate; I might go and do whatever. I just went into our career center there, in Kentucky, and thought, "Well, let's look at the private sector, and let's look at the public." I thought, "Well, you know, the National Archives might be the place. I have my master's in history. We'll just put one out there." And I didn't really think much about what would happen, and then got a call back, I remember, from St. Louis and just in general, and then Rod called me about the Reagan library, in particular, then we were off to the races.

So, I never expected to go from Lexington, Kentucky to L.A., but that was an amazing experience going out there. I made a set of friends there, too, that have stayed with me throughout my entire career; just really wonderful people. A lot of us, just out of college, starting there, and a really good experience to start up the presidential library, like I've done here, as well. And to meet Ronald Reagan—I met so many

interesting people through the years, thanks to this job, thanks to this agency. So, I've been really, really blessed in that regard.

MR. KABREL: Very good. Let's take a step back, and maybe if you can kind of work our way up from where and when you were born, and then your educational experiences, and maybe some of how that kind of helped you in your career. And then, we'll work it through the Reagan Library experience, and FDR.

MR. LOWE: Sure. Sure, sure. Well, I was born in Paris, Kentucky. That's in central Kentucky, not too far from Lexington, in Bourbon County. So, I grew up there on a farm. We raised tobacco and had cattle; for a part of that time, a dairy farm as well there in Bourbon County, with another farm in Nicholas County. So, very much a farm life growing up. I went into the University of Kentucky in 1982 thinking I was going to be a doctor. So, I tell that to new students, and all the students that I speak to now, it's good to have some passion, but also have some flexibility. Because when you get there, you're going to keep growing, and you're going to realize, you know, "Here's where my passion really is, rather than here."

After the first semester at Kentucky, I realized that to become a good doctor, I needed to understand chemistry and math, and so forth, and I simply did not. So, I had one of those moments where I stepped back and thought, "What do I really love?" I grew up in a family that was very focused on history and politics. I still remember sitting around the kitchen table, and listening to debates about Vietnam, and everything else. That was really what we focused on. I remember, also, as a kid going to Abraham Lincoln's birthplace, and to the hermitage with Andrew Jackson in Nashville. So, we were always kind of history-oriented and sort of politically—my mother was very active in the Democratic party there in Kentucky, and I would go hand out flyers with her, and work at the polls with her, and all that. So, always very focused on that, and I realized that's where my love was.

So, I switched to the history department at Kentucky, and I got my undergraduate major in history and minor in political science, and really, for most of that time thought I would go into law. I love studying the law as well, and I thought I'd go and get a law degree. But as I went on, I realized how much I loved history. So, I also applied for graduate school there. And I was very fortunate, between undergraduate and graduate school, to be selected to go to Oxford University for a summer and study British foreign policy, thanks to the English Speaking Union. It was a great program. I went for a couple of months to England, and that really cemented in me the fact that I love political history and science.

So, I came back. They offered me a wonderful fellowship in Kentucky my first year, so I went back to Kentucky and started my work on my master's. I also became a teaching assistant at Kentucky, and realized that I loved teaching as well. I really did like organizing lesson plans, and interacting with the students. And so, I did that and got my master's in 1988. And then, that's when the unknowns began, I didn't know exactly what to do next, and Kentucky was so good to me. I worked at the Margaret I. King library while I was in Kentucky, and got to know the role of libraries in that regard, which was great. And they let me kind of continue on the spring semester there in '89, even though I had no idea what was next.

I was technically in their doctoral program, but I pretty much knew, at that point, that I didn't want to get my doctorate right away, but I didn't know what the next thing was. And that's when, as I said earlier, I thank goodness I lucked into the job at the Reagan Library, and that really kind of set my life's course at that point. So, definitely, I grew up in a family where history, politics, were very much a big part of the discussion every day, it seems like, so I think that's what runs underneath all of it.

MR. KABREL: And as well as following your passion, too. It seems to be something that also helped you, too. Not also, necessarily, thinking of monetary gain or something like that, but following something that you really like to do.

MR. LOWE: That's something that's not certainly easy to do. And I understand now, as a parent, particularly, my father saying to me, "Tell me again why you didn't go to law school?" Because that is a much clearer path to financial independence. But he was very proud, as my mom was too, what I was able to do with that degree. I've got to say, Kentucky as a school really did a great job preparing me for what I've done; in terms of critical thinking, and research capability. In so many different ways, I think it was a great school. I stayed very involved with Kentucky. I'm on the History Department Advisory Committee group there. And another group there that works with small-town issues, and community issues, I'm on their board as well. So, I'm really proud of Kentucky.

I think they've even gotten to be a better university since. They were not only good in terms of what they taught me, but they were also—what's the word—supportive. So, this kind of group of professors and other people who I felt like were always watching out for me. The program in Oxford, for example. I was young and stupid. I had no idea that program even existed. And two professors there came and said, "You need to apply for this. You'd be perfect for it; you need to do it." And sure enough, I got it, but I never would have even known about it if not for them. So, I owe Kentucky a lot.

MR. KABREL: Were there one or two professors that were like mentors to you at Kentucky, or at Oxford? Question one. And question two, do you feel an obligation, in a way, on your part since there are so many wonderful teachers, to be a teacher to other young people growing up?

MR. LOWE: I think, yes. The answer to that one is absolutely, yes. And just going back a second, to the mentors, I think I've been so fortunate, throughout my entire life, to have people helping and mentoring me, right? So, I mean, obviously, my family; my mom and dad, truly amazing, always there. When I got to Kentucky, I mean, in high school, great teachers. Mr. Turner, I remember, was a great history teacher. And looking back now, I realize Mr. Turner and Mr. Stuart in high school helped keep that passion for history there.

In college, I had an amazing adviser, Girard Silverstein, particularly in graduate school, but also undergraduate, was always there. And I was very fortunate, for part of my time in grad school, to be a teaching assistant for him as well. And he was this, at that point, older guy seen as very tough, but my gosh, he was so good to me. And I remember, one semester I was a teaching assistant along with

another young lady and she had to leave midway through the semester, so I inherited all of her sections as well, which was kind of overwhelming. A lot of work, you know, to teach and grade all those papers, and everything. Silverstein was so supportive. I remember, at the end, I went over to his house and he gave me a pair of cuff links, and a note to thank me. I still have that to this day, because it meant so much to me, because I really, really respected him.

Also, Jeremy Popkin was a great teacher there in Kentucky, and has stayed in touch with me ever since. George Herring as well. George is a great American historian. So, I only had a couple classes with him, oddly enough, focused on European history when I was in Kentucky. But George was always there as this kind of icon in the department, but also, a really nice guy; always really supportive, and George has stayed in touch as well, over the years. And so many others—Hobson, and Al Passeti—they had this really great core of people who were great researchers, and great professors; but also, just really great people. I was very, very fortunate in that regard. I know I'm leaving out people. I'll feel bad. But those are some of the big ones.

And then, certainly, at the National Archives. When I went to Reagan, you had people like Rod Soubers, who taught me a lot and realized that coming in, I didn't know, really, much at all about being an archivist, and kind of taking me under their wing. So, when I got back to Washington, so many people, but right away, Pat Borders. Pat had started the Johnson Library. When I got to the Central Office, he was deputy NL at that point, Deputy of the Office of Presidential Libraries, and became a close friend, and really great mentor.

Later, David Peterson was head of the Presidential Libraries, and taught me a ton. And we had a lot of fun together, too. But he was, again, one of those guys that a lot of people thought was extraordinarily gruff. You know, he could be a pretty tough guy, but you see him and you just—brilliant, supportive and so good to me in so many ways, and helped me really develop in my career.

In terms of other directors, Richard Norton Smith was always a great mentor to me throughout the years, you know? He had been at so many different libraries. And Richard became a good friend, and offered tremendous advice through the years, and was very helpful. When I decided to strike out and go to the Baker Center, he was extraordinarily helpful in that regard as well. So, I could name—Duke Blackwood at Reagan has been a terrific friend, and someone I learned a lot from over the years, as well.

So, they're all over the place. I have been very, very fortunate at the agency to have—Sharon Fawcett is someone in that category as well, who took me under their wing, taught me a lot, and has been such a good friend and mentor to me. So, anyway, a lot of people. And yes, I do feel a responsibility. I love to teach, and I want to try to, in a way, impart whatever lessons I've learned. And God knows, I don't always recognize those lessons, or put them into effect once I have learned them. But particularly, I love working with university students. I did at the University of Tennessee, and certainly here at SMU, to do what I can to help. I just, right before this interview, had a going-away lunch with my mentee at Parrish Episcopal School. They've asked me to be part of their Leadership Institute while I was there, and I mentored a young lady there who was just a phenomenal, phenomenal student. And this being, in some

small way, being helpful to her and to other students here has been really, really a great source of happiness for me over these past few years.

MR. KABREL: I think the term "paying it forward" could be used here.

MR. LOWE: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I just love being able to say I can have some type of positive impact for this person, and pass on something to them that could be useful. And that makes me happier than anything, to see them being successful and kind of following their passion as well. Certainly, I do that every day. I have a beautiful and brilliant 14-year-old daughter. Sometimes kids don't want to listen to you, but she does. She's a great student. Really, really, very dedicated student, and I try my best to say, "Hey, sweetie, these are things I've learned through the years, and these are things, maybe, you should think about." And in multiple ways, I've tried to do that.

MR. KABREL: Let's see. Maybe if you could describe your first day on the job. We'll take it from there. Your first day on the job at the Reagan Library, and just take us through some of your accomplishments, and then we'll move onto your job at the National Archives.

MR. LOWE: Well, I can never forget my first day at the Reagan Library, because it was complete and total insanity. We were moving out from Lexington, Kentucky to Los Angeles. And a person there had helped find an apartment for us, kind of sight unseen, right? So, Kathy and I went this long drive across the country in this old Ford Ltd., or whatever it was; it barely made it there. And we drive in L.A. Very early that day, we first get there, and we had driven in from somewhere in Arizona, so it was a long drive, and we get to the apartment that had been rented for us, and boy, was it a bad apartment; it was not good at all.

Kathy, my wife, said, "I am not staying here even one night." So, as soon as the Reagan—it was in the Reagan Project—they were in the temporary facility there in Los Angeles. We drove in. I met Biff Henley, who was then the director of the library; introduced myself, he swore me in. It was great to meet all of them. And I said, "You know, I have to probably have to go this afternoon, and find a different apartment." And he said, "Hop in the car. We'll go to lunch, and we'll find an apartment." So, Biff, thank God—I didn't know anything about Los Angeles—drove us around the neighborhood, and we found a different apartment. So, that day we drove in from Arizona, I got sworn in the job, I broke a lease and signed a lease for another apartment, and told the moving company to go to a new place all within, like, an eight-hour period. It was insanity. But it showed me that the National Archives was a caring place, because Biff understood that I was in a bit of a fix, and helped fix it for me.

So, the great day I got sworn in, and then the next day I came back, and only a few of us were there at that point. A couple people had come in from Washington, and my friend Greg Cumming, who has remained my best friend since then, started that day with me. I remember sitting in our cubicles, trying to figure out, "What do we do next? How does this place work?" And trying to sit down with Rod, and see, "This is what an archivist does. This is what presidential library does. This is what we have here." And thinking, "Hey, this is going to be a really good gig." So, yeah, a really crazy first day there.

And then the first day in Washington, I remember back there in '92, to the Central Office. It's a different deal altogether, in that now I'm dealing with a lot of administrative issues. So, I've got to learn about facilities, and personnel, and contracts, and all these things. So, Pat—who I mentioned earlier, but who became a great mentor—the very first day I'm sitting at my cubicle, and he walks up and drops this huge packet on my desk. And he said, "That's a contract. Read it and learn it." I thought, "What have I gotten myself into?" But I did. I read it, and made sure that I tried to be the best prepared person in the agency for all those things. And really, it was the quick course on how the agency, and specifically, how presidential libraries run. What it takes to open the doors every morning.

I always say, when they made me director of the Bush Library, when I was acting director of FDR, I had already been to the classroom ever, because Central Office, we dealt with every issue imaginable. And how do you fix those things? How do you serve the libraries? How do you make sure they're accomplishing their mission, and you're helping them out to do that? I dealt with those issues day in and day out. It really was a great learning experience. So, that first day, a little overwhelming trying to figure all that out; but again, I had great teachers like Pat to get me there.

MR. KABREL: Did anything that you had accomplished in the Reagan era of your career help you with what you were facing now?

MR. LOWE: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, because that Archives—and also, I wasn't in the museum, but seeing the operations of the museum and seeing what they were starting to do in education, I realized, "That's what it's all about, right? That's what we're supposed to be supporting and helping." So, the Reagan Library gave me a really good, excellent knowledge of what our mission is, and really in-depth understanding of the archival part of it, right? And so, when I got back to D.C., I always saw my goal there of helping them do that; helping them accomplish that mission." So, I understood it better than I ever did if I had just been plopped down in the Central Office. It, in some ways, it gave me a perfect beginning for it.

And you know, every now and then, they pulled me into some archival issue, which I liked; I wasn't in it much, but some specific things. But I remember when the JFK Assassination Review Board was bringing in materials from all the libraries, I did some second review for them, just because I still had my clearances, I still knew how to do archival things, and that was kind of cool to be part of that. So, every now and then they'd throw me a bone as an archivist, to help with something like that. And then also, one of the neatest things I did at the Central Office was help with presidential moves. So, I helped move Bush 41 and Clinton out of the White House. And having that archival background, I think, was really good for that because I understood the importance of the records, and inventories, and all that kind of stuff.

MR. KABREL: How involved were you at the Reagan Library in actually getting the Reagan Library up and going?

MR. LOWE: So, when we got there, we were in the temporary facility down in L.A., and we helped plan the move, that was one of the big things. I remember I was part of a team there to help plan the move. And we all worked on it, from that temporary facility up to the permanent facility. But also, that was one of the first times that I got kind of pulled into the other side of the operations, because Rod would assign a couple of us to go up and help when they were building the facility to do X, Y, and Z.

So, that's the first time I remember I met Steve Hannestad, who was a legend at the National Archives, and facilities, and security. And Steve came out, and I remember I was assigned with Greg to go with Steve and to do different facility things in the building under construction. And again, that gave me taste of, you know, as important as this, there's more to this than processing records, and doing references, and so forth. This is kind of the structure underneath this that makes it all work. So, I was involved in that review with him.

I remember helping plan out the move of the staff member and office files, and trying to figure out how best to arrange them in the new facility. So, trying to make sure we had the storage areas right. But that was my main involvement, as I recall. My brain is not as good as it used to be, but that's the main thing I remember, in terms of helping him make the move from L.A. up to Simi Valley. And of course, the really interesting thing about Reagan is that's the first Presidential Records Act library; so the first time that the PRA went into effect was at Reagan. So, being part of that kind of first archival team, trying to figure out, "How do we implement this new act?" Working with the Central Office, and particularly with Nancy Smith, another legend at the National Archives, and being a young archivist trying to learn how to do that, looking back on it, it was very interesting. At the time, it could be sometimes perplexing, right, trying to figure out how to do this. And they did a really fascinating thing.

MR. KABREL: Interesting. Did you ever meet President Reagan and Nancy Reagan, or any other Reagan cabinet?

MR. LOWE: Oh, yes. Absolutely. President Reagan several times. I remember, the first time was the Christmas party in '89, he always would come down to our little events like that, at the temporary site. Very nice guy. Would love to tell us stories, particularly about Hollywood. He didn't ever talk any current politics, thankfully, but he was really very generous with his time with us. I just loved him dearly.

I went to his house once. I remember, we went with Greg. They said that the president had some items to send to the collection—artifacts. And so they sent us up with this van, and I thought, "Well, I'm going to go up there and stack. Members are just going to hand us the stuff, and we'll drive it back down to the temporary facility." Greg and I got out of the van, and started walking towards the front door, and Reagan opened the door and said, "I've been waiting on you fellas." And we spoke to him for a good half hour, I remember, in the living room, just about the library, and just telling different stories.

One of the things that—I was probably about 25—that was kind of overwhelming. To think, "I'm standing here with Ronald Reagan, talking." It was really a very, very neat experience. So, you know, a few more times he came down. Mrs. Reagan came down to some of the events as well, at the

temporary facility. So, yeah, got to meet them a great deal. And other members of the cabinet—I know Ed Meese was there quite a bit. Who else? I'm drawing blanks now. I know Maureen Reagan was around quite a bit—during the construction, in particular, I remember her being there. Very supportive. I remember, just the other night here, as I'm preparing to leave, President Bush had a little going away dinner for my family. And I said to him, "You know, looking back on this, I've had so many great experiences thanks to being part of presidential libraries. Who would ever have thought that a young guy putting up tobacco in Kentucky would someday be having a dinner with the president?" You know? It's just a really awesome experience. And it all started with Reagan.

MR. KABREL: Wow. That's quite a collection of stories. Do you have anything else before we leave Reagan, and the Reagan Library? Any other stories that you'd like to tell us, or topics you'd like to cover?

MR. LOWE: They make fun of me here, because I've told this story a few times, but it's very true. The first time I met President Reagan, at that first Christmas party, after we had had kind of the photos with him and all, he came in and was just talking to all of us in our little breakroom there. We formed this semi-circle around him, I remember, and he was just talking about this and that. And suddenly—I don't remember why—the crowd kind of broke up, everyone doing different things, and I'm standing alone with Ronald Reagan. And again, I'm really overwhelmed; I could not think of anything to say. And finally, I'm looking at him, and he's looking at me, and finally I said, "Mr. President, would you like a cookie?" That's all I can think to ask him. And from then on, my mom, and family, and friends made fun of me because all I could think to ask was if he wanted a cookie. But my defense always is, the man did want a cookie. We went and got a cookie together, and he was obviously hungry. So, I think it might have been the right question, but people have made fun of me for years now, that that was the first thing that I could think of to ask him. But very, very good experience there, and again, this kind of core group of people that were a lot of fun to work with, but very dedicated to what we were doing, putting that place together. So, anyway, a great experience.

MR. KABREL: Wow. What another great story. Thank you, Alan. And we'll move on from there, onto your time as a senior management analyst. And you were talking a little bit about it. Tell us a little bit about the move from L.A. to D.C.

MR. LOWE: Sure. So, I was very fortunate to be hired for the Central Offices. It's something I knew I wanted, and I was very fortunate that when I started making inquiries, is right when they had a potential opening. So, I did that. I remember, we drove home to Kentucky from L.A. and stopped on the way, and got to see folks, and then arrived there in January in D.C.—in January of '92. We drove into town. I remember, it was a horrible ice storm, but we made it. We lived in Alexandria, Virginia; found a nice townhome there to rent, and eventually purchased a townhome just off of Van Dorn Street. I went in. At first I was there on Mahogany Row, in Archives I. That's before Archives II was built. So, that's where my cubicle was, there, in the Office of the Presidential Libraries suite.

Again, my portfolio grew over the years. Back then, the agency was smaller. Certainly, Central Office was a lot smaller than it is now. There were a few folks who worked on the archival side. Nancy Smith was

over that. John Fawcett was head of the office when I got there, and Pat Borders was his deputy. On the administrative side, it was me, Jackie Wood—who had been there many, many years—Michelle Cobb, and that was pretty much it. There were three of us.

Looking back, what really gave me the opportunity was to get my hands in a lot of everything, and to learn a lot. So, I always say to folks, what Michelle and I did a lot was volunteer for things. So, we'd go into meetings—she'd have been in meetings with the heads of offices, because there were so many things to attend to and only a few of us, right? So, it was kind of a great classroom for me, and a great way, frankly, for me to move up because the management at the agency got to know me, I learned a lot. And so over time, I was very happy to be able to kind of climb up the GS ladder a bit there, and get even more responsibility. I'm trying to remember what year we moved out to All. I don't remember exactly what year. I know it was after '96, but went on to A2, to the office there. So, I think—I don't remember exactly when we did that, but it was in the late nineties that my office transferred out onto All.

The first year that I was in NL—that was in '92—at the end of that year was when H.W. Bush lost the election. And so, really interesting part about that first year is I was detailed to the White House the day after the election, along with a team of other National Archive employees to help box up the White House and prepare for the move to College Station. Typically, when we helped plan the Clinton move, that was something we planned for over a year. But for Bush 41, we just had November to January to plan and execute it. So, I was one of the busy bees over at the White House, boxing up a lot of stuff, working with other NL employees and with military folks in the Pentagon to box it up, get it out to Andrews and then down to College Station. Really, an experience I still think about a lot. Again, it taught me a lot. It was a little chaotic at times, but really, really neat experience.

MR. KABREL: So, in some ways, your experience goes from actually packing the boxes, all the way up to high-level administrative work.

MR. LOWE: That's right. And they're making the inventory after inventory of our packed up boxes, to later direct one of the places. And one of the funny things is, I remember—hopping back to Reagan for a second—when I was there, Warren Finch came up as an archivist. He had been in Central Office, and wanted to get out in the field, and he came out as an archivist. I guess I'm trying to remember how I first talked with Warren, but I guess I had talked to him in Central Office at the phone. And when he came down, he asked us if he could stay with us a few days, at our apartment, while he found a place. So, he essentially lived in our living room for three or four days while we found an apartment for him. And you know, we'd go out and drink a beer and everything, and we were just amazed that all these days later, that Warren and I are the directors of the two Bush libraries. So, you know, kind of came full circle from that first day having a beer together, trying to figure out what the hell this place is all about, to both being the directors for the Bush libraries. Pretty cool.

MR. KABREL: There's some lessons to be learned there, for people that will be listening to this in the future.

MR. LOWE: Yeah. Right? And you know, the friendships, and networking are all very important too, right? So, just being able to reach out to people, it's been a very cool experience in that regard, too. Again, some of the best friends in the world are the folks that I've met at this agency, for sure.

MR. KABREL: I think that's the value of working at headquarters as well.

MR. LOWE: Yeah.

MR. KABREL: The regions don't necessarily have that opportunity as much, and I think in the headquarters you had that opportunity, which is definitely something that I recognize.

MR. LOWE: I think that's very true. I made great friends at Reagan, but going back to the Central Office, I met so many more people and so many more people in different areas, you know? And I think just the nature of the job, I had to learn a lot about—at Reagan, I hadn't thought anything about procurement. In Central Office, I had to really learn about Federal procurement; not always the most fun thing to learn about, but I had to. And as part of that, I met a lot of people. I met a lot of friends. So, yeah, it's very interesting, for sure, to be a part of that Central Office operation.

MR. KABREL: So, your time at the FDR Library as Director coincides with your time as a senior management analyst in College Park. How did that come about?

MR. LOWE: Well, thinking back, I know Verne Newton was the outgoing director at FDR. And Peterson was head of the office. And I remember, they were having discussions about, "What do we do? It's going to take a bit of time to get a new permanent director in. What do we do?" And I remember Verne taking me outside AI one day for lunch, and we sat down, and he said, "What would you think about being an acting director?" And I thought it sounded like an amazing opportunity. And I think he spoke to David, and David agreed that it would be a good way to go. So, next thing I know, I'm flying up to Hyde Park—a wonderful place. If you haven't been, check it out. It's just a really, very neat place. And a great staff.

I was very fortunate; kind of, at that point, a relatively young guy going in to try to make sure that we ran the ship right until we got a good permanent director in. But some of them had been there 20-plus years. So, just to go in to learn from them, to support them where I could. At first I would go up—I think I remember a couple weeks out of every month, and then it got down to maybe a week out of every month, and then by the phone—but just making sure that I was doing whatever I could to help him out.

Not only was that a transition period between directors, but also, we were just getting into the somewhat difficult beginnings for the planning for that visiting center that's up there. And so, just trying to get that on track, and to move it towards the finish line, finally, it took many, many years to do. It was an important part of what I wanted to do up there as well. So, that was that. They always joked that I did that work concurrent with my other duties, which meant that they didn't pay me any more to do it, but I do recall getting a nice little bonus at the end, which was appreciated. But really, the biggest payment to me was learning. I learned a lot, and got to know a lot more people, really wonderful people there at

FDR. And I also learned—I would go, for example, and visit Marist, which is nearby, and one of their partners. So, I learned a lot more about how you can work with an academic partner.

I worked a lot with Bill Baninoval and the folks at the Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and I realized even more—I knew it before, but I realized even more how important it is to have a good relationship with your foundation, and the potential that you can unlock when you have a good working relationship with them. So, that was just one of the many lessons that Hyde Park taught me.

MR. KABREL: And you worked with the National Park Service as well.

MR. LOWE: Yes, that's exactly right. And that was part of some of those ongoing discussions—looking back, that was a very long ongoing discussion, I think. When I got back in '92, the first trip I took was to Hyde Park, to go up and begin discussions about a visitor center, and I think we dedicated that visitor's center in '03 or '04. So, it took a little while from that first discussion to figure out, "What do we want? Where are you going to put it? How are you going to fund it? How is it going to relate to the park service? What does the Institute think?" et cetera, to get from here to there. But yeah, working with the Park Service, had a couple different Park Service directors while I was in Central Office, and then later as acting director. Again, figuring out, "How do you interact best with them? What are our strengths? Where should we be working together to serve the customers better?" that kind of thing. That taught me a little bit about visitor experience, too; thinking about, "well, let's just not think of it as, "Well, we're an agency, they're an agency."

But overall, how are we serving people coming to this site. So, they're coming here, seeing us, seeing the home. How are we going to make sure the visitor center is a really, really good part of that? And also, at that point we just started discussing what became the renovation of the FDR Library. So, I had to learn a lot, and not always the easy way, about how you deal with things like historic preservation issues, right? Because FDR had a hand in designing that facility, so you had to be careful, from a cultural preservation perspective, to do it right. But at the time, we knew operationally that things needed to be changed, and the museum needed to be updated and all that. So, it taught me a good amount about, "How do you work with the historic people? How do you work with the Park Service? How do you work with different parts of the National Archives to see how you kind of move that kind of stuff forward?"

MR. KABREL: In June of 1998, when you were offered this position as interim director of the FDR Library, do you feel that it was overwhelming for you, or do you feel that by throwing you into the water it was the only way you were going to learn how to swim?

MR. LOWE: I don't mean to sound cocky, but I did not feel overwhelmed. I felt a great sense of responsibility, and I did have to prioritize certain things.

MR. KABREL: But you were ready?

MR. LOWE: I think I was ready for it. And again, that was some great teachers and mentors, but also, I knew that the staff there was good. And certainly, when I started going up there, that was just confirmed that they were a very good crew. So, I knew I wasn't running the place by myself; that I could rely on people like Lynn Bassanese and others to make sure things were going well. And I didn't feel overwhelmed. I think occasionally I remember coming back to Central Office thinking, "Now, how exactly am I going to get this budget together now? Because I've got two hours to do it, rather than two weeks." But no, I really didn't feel overwhelmed because I thought, at that point— I guess I had been in Central Office six years at that point. I thought I had a good handle on what was going there, and what libraries did overall, so it was a good experience.

MR. KABREL: Yes. I feel that the staff being well-trained and being together for a long time gave you really fertile ground for you to learn other things.

MR. LOWE: Yeah. That's exactly right. And I think, also, knowing that I had been involved with them, in terms of discussion with the visitor center, I knew some of them personally already. And also, I had good connections already with Bill vanden Heuvel, and his folks at the Institute, the private side of the operation. So, I was a known quantity to them. I knew them, so it wasn't like I was going into some mystery situation. I knew some of the folks, and I had been there several times in my capacity at Central Office. I knew the facility. So, that made it easier as well.

MR. KABREL: Great. Alan, moving on, is there anything else you would like to say about your time as senior management analyst and interim director before we move on?

MR. LOWE: There's so much that in eleven years could be done in a few minutes. I think that kind of, over time, more and more, learning about how we can do things better. I know, when I was in Central Office, when we first started talking about the whole idea of management controls, and making sure that we're giving the support we should be giving, and that we're calling out issues where there are issues, and doing it in a supportive way. I think that, again, looking back on those 11 years, the most interesting parts—well, obviously, we were meeting a lot of people—but then doing things. We redid the facility standards for presidential libraries.

I mean, you really saw us coming in, starting to get ready to come into the 21st century, because I remember, when I first got back to Central Office, there were maybe five or six pages of standards we would hand to foundations when the libraries starting being built, and saying, "This is what we need," but we realized, and certainly Steve realized that we needed to be doing more in that regard to make sure the building we got at the end was the building we needed.

And so, that whole facility standard redo that I know is still an ongoing thing today started when I was in Central Office, and people like Steve Hannestad and our security folks, and all that, had a huge part in putting that together. And it was really interesting for me to be a little part of that, and again, learn a lot, and to see this is the agency that I think is doing a better job of working with our private foundations and saying, "This is what we expect. You don't have to guess what we want anymore. Here is what we

need when you're building these beautiful new facilities for us." So, every day was interesting for sure, and again, a great classroom for me.

MR. KABREL: Two questions before we leave this area. And you just touched on one, I think, that we can ask now. Which is, how did the growth of technology do in the period of the nineties, of computer technology? How has that changed from the earlier days, even before you joined here, and by the time you left this period of your life?

MR. LOWE: Yeah. I think the biggest response of that is that electronic records has changed everything. So, when I was a young archivist at Reagan—I'm trying to remember the number—somewhere over 40 million pages of paper records. And then, of course, our audiovisual department had a big collection of photos, and so forth. But they're completely dwarfed by what we have here. We have 70 million pages of paper records at the Bush Library, but a billion pages of emails. So, everything has changed for the archival world, and preservation, of course, thankfully. But how do you process that much stuff in a timely way for our researchers? Still the biggest challenge, I think, we have here in the archival part of what we do, of how do you really tackle that challenge going into the future? So, we have a great crew here, great archivists, and they process a good amount of records every year. But even if you would double my archival crew, or triple my archival queue, we'd still have a larger queue because of the size of the electronic record collection. That certainly wasn't anything you had to think about at Reagan. So, this is really the first library—Clinton, I think, has 4 million emails. I'm not sure how many pages that is—I'm not going to guess. But I know here, we have over 200 million email, and that totals, I think, just over a billion pages. So, really, a fundamental difference in the nature of our archives, and the challenges those archives present in providing access to them.

MR. KABREL: I noticed, and this is an add-on question to that one, an answer as best that you feel capable of doing it, but do you feel that NARA could have done a better job in electronic records?

MR. LOWE: Yeah, I think NARA did a very good job in setting up the RA. So, I think that when Clinton left, and when Bush left, there was an ERA to ingest all of this information, right? So, I give great credit to NARA and working with Lockheed Martin and others, to have this system put together so we don't have to worry about, "Where is it going? How is it being preserved?" Where it could do better is, is thinking about, how do we assist archivists in processing these records now that we've got them? So, we said we can provide them electronically. But I said we're still figuring it out, but I think we'll get there.

Where I came from, I'm trying to preach a little bit on this, I come from a spot where I'm not Mr. Technology; I will admit this. But I just know, looking at what my staff is going through and the challenges we face here, my basic view is, National Archives needs to do a better job at figuring out how we provide technological tools to archivists to be able to eliminate the need to view every page, line-by-line, for some of these requests, at least. So, in other words, if my archivist here has a request, and say, as part of that request, we realize there are 100,000 pages of responsive emails, right? In my dream world, they'd be able to put those 100,000 pages through a filter of some type, and that filter would say, "You really only need to review, line-by-line, 80,000 pages because these other 20,000, we know, don't

have any closers or exemptions in them." I don't know how we get from here to there. I understand the concerns about that. You don't want to miss national security or personal privacy. It's also difficult, I think, for archivists sometimes to distinguish the exceptions.

So take, particularly for example, the confidential advice closure that we had for the first 12 years at PRA Libraries; very difficult to define and implement. But I really think if we don't take a very aggressive stance, and try to figure that question out, and try to figure out what kind of technology would lend help to archivists, then, I think, we might be in a little trouble. The size of electronic collections are only going to grow monumentally. I'm sure the Obama Library will have five or six times whatever we have here. So, it really gets to the point of absurdity, almost, saying, "Well, the answer is to give you more human beings," because that won't matter at some point. You will never staff them with that many people, to read that many pages, in a year. So, I really think to technology, I don't think the National Archives has gotten to that point of really.

I'm not in any way trying to speak poorly of anyone. I know there have been a lot of challenges, and I know this won't be an easy thing to do. But I think, really, we need to do, maybe, a better job of saying, "Here are a few possibilities. We really need to run them, and test them out, and figure this out before it gets any worse." So, what we face here, then, is when the first day—I think the first week or so that we were open to FOIA—you know, there's a five-year period where we're not open, and then after five years, anyone on the planet can submit a Freedom of Information Act request. I think in that first week or so, we had more pages requested here than requested at Reagan in 25 years. And that's because the responses request had all those email pages, right? So, that is only going to get worse, and we've got to figure out a technological aid to help archivists respond in a timely manner to those requests. So, that's what I think. We've got to get there, I think.

MR. KABREL: Very good. Thank you. And then, the next question can also apply to your kind of position. Politically working, and this, again, answer it the best way you want to, if you want to, but I know it can be very sensitive to work. Political environment can be very sensitive in the libraries, working with the Foundation. Did you find it to be a very sensitive, kind of like a catwalk?

MR. LOWE: I really haven't, and I'm being completely honest with you in that. I've found, you know, when I was speaking just to Bush here right now, when I first went up to interview and talk to NARA, and then go over and meet with the President, that was really interesting. I interviewed for about two weeks. You know, I met with the White House Chief of Staff, and Mrs. Bush's Chief of Staff, and a few other really interesting people in the White House. But my last interview was with the President and Mrs. Bush in the Oval Office, which is really interesting, to say the least. I had a great conversation. At the end, he said, "What do we do next?" And one of his staffers said, "Well, if you agree, you just need to say what you think." And President Bush said, "Let's do it," and that was kind of it.

So, the next thing I know, I'm on the way to Dallas. In those meetings, I met with the then-head of the Bush Foundation, ambassador Mark Langdale, who became a really, really good friend. I said to Mark, "When you look at presidential libraries, the successful ones..." think they're all successful, right? But,

"The ones who have had continual success are the ones that establish good working relationships with their foundation. That's the bottom line." And in the instances where you've seen library management and foundation management fighting, that's when those libraries are not as successful. So, I don't ever want to be in the position where we are fighting. He fully agreed with that.

Also, though, one thing that Mark and I—and then later Margaret Spellings and I, when she became head of the Foundation—we all agreed on was that we have some common goals, and we are roommates in this building. So, we have to work together in a multitude of ways, but we also have to understand, we're also different institutions, right? So, they are a private institution. They have a set of goals, some of which are ours, some of which they do on their own. I'm a Federal agency. So, sometimes we overlap. Other times, I have to say to them, "This is a Federal rule." Or, "This is what the agency needs to do in this regard." And as long as we respect each other, and we understand that we are different institutions, but we have to work together, we're in great shape.

I've been very fortunate here in that the heads of the Foundation and the people they've hired understand that. We, from day one, have been talking a lot together. I meet constantly with the Foundation, and the result has been a great relationship, a ton of support from them, and no battles. So, that's been a real blessing. When I was at Roosevelt, great relationship with Bill vanden Heuvel, and the Institute, same thing. And I learned, I had a board of directors out there, and a somewhat similar situation of this, keeping those communications up, and understanding that sometimes they're going to have to do what they do, and I'm going to have to do what I do, but most of the time, we can work together.

So, I work with a living President and first lady. I do want them to be happy with what we do. I do want to listen to any comments they have about X, Y, and Z; but at the same time, I do represent a Federal agency, and everyone has worked within those parameters and understood it. So, I really haven't had to do a lot of political advancing; just making sure I understand, I keep in mind where they're coming from. You know what I mean? I can't just go into it and say, "Well, I'm a federal guy, and here's the way it's going to be." I try to understand, "Where is the Foundation coming from on this issue? What, in terms of their priorities and their goals, would be driving them to want to do X?" And so if I understand that, then I can understand, "Okay, well, I've got that goal. I know my goal is this. Where can we meet together on this, and accomplish what we're both trying to accomplish without having a fight about it?" So, putting myself in their shoes has been a big, big key part of how I can try to make this successful here.

MR. KABREL: Taking us up to January of 2003.

MR. LOWE: Yeah.

MR. KABREL: Simple question, and speak at length about this as long as you would like. What did you bring to the Baker Center for Public Policy, and what did you take from it?

MR. LOWE: Sure. I think, you know, when I went down to talk to the folks in Knoxville about the Baker Center, in large part, what I presented to them, they were trying to figure out what the center was going to be, and I said, "Here's a possible vision for it." And it was based, in part, on what I had learned from presidential libraries. So, I said, "This can be a wonderful center for history and learning, and for research, right?" So, I said, "We can do public programs; we can do educational programs. We can have a museum. We can build tremendous archives, and we can support research projects." Right? So, those are the big buckets.

And all of them were directly based on what I had learned all those years at Reagan Central Office and FDR. And they liked it. They said, "That's what we want to do." So, I was very fortunate in that regard, that they actually liked the model. So, I think I brought that ability to say, "Here's the vision for that place." I love Senator Baker, and they wanted to honor Senator Baker. And they knew, in general, we want to talk about the history and the making of public policy," but beyond that, they really hadn't thought it out a whole bunch.

I don't mean to discredit them. I mean, just really, they had gotten a grant from Congress, and I'm glad they made that initiative. But beyond that, the specifics would still be ironed out. So, I was able to come in and say, "Hey, here's the way you could do this." And they said yes. In terms of what I've brought away, it's almost impossible to say that in any quick fashion. I learned so much. Let's see. Number one, the importance of partnerships; being able to work with University of Tennessee, with community partners, with national and international partners, you can't go it alone. So, particularly when you're building a public policy from nothing, which is what we do, being an established institution, being able to find those good partners to help you move forward in your mission—absolutely.

I think I brought away a better understanding of the world of research and academia. I worked a lot with professors there; with students at Tennessee. Learned a lot about that. Related to that, I learned a lot about education. We made a separate part of the Baker Center what we called our Center for Civil Engagement, which is all about civil education, and getting particularly younger people—but particularly, everyone—to engage more in their communities. So, in addition to trying to help social studies, and civics, and history teachers, we also did things like workshops on how to run for public office, those types of things, which really had an impact in our area and around the state.

On a social studies commission for the state, we did all kinds of really interesting studies about governance. So, we really made education a key part of what we did. We had a Baker Learning Community. We had wonderful Baker scholars. Among students, it became a very competitive program. These wonderful students, I always joked with them that I knew they were going to run the world somehow, so I would be nice to them now, so they would be nice to me later. Really phenomenal young men and women. And that showed me, again, that the power of these institutions to do good, to work with young people, help them think about what they want to do with their lives, and they give them a good base of understanding, in that respect, about how our Government works, and the history of this nation, and how they can be part of moving it forward. So, I learned that.

I learned a lot about fundraising at Baker. I hadn't really done that too much before, but we had to raise \$18 million for our facility; we had to raise money for ongoing programs, conferences, and so forth. And I learned a lot about development, relationship-making fundraising there, for sure. Gosh. There's so many things. I learned a lot about Howard Baker, that's for sure, who was a great man, and he taught me a ton about the importance of civility, working across the aisle with people, being able to laugh. He thought humor was so important in getting things done and keeping your sanity while you did it. Just a good man, through and through, and a great example to me of how you can be a good person and excel. You know? Just really rock-solid integrity.

I often think back to the first time he talked to me about his role in the Watergate Committee. And he went in right as he was appointed Vice Chair of the Committee. He met Nixon at the old executive office building. He went in there thinking that it was Democratic dirty tricks; that he was just kind of being set up in some way. And he said to Nixon, "Hey, you know, I've always been a supporter. I want to make sure this is fair." He said Nixon acted very oddly. And at the end of it, Baker said, "Well, you know, I hope my friend John Mitchell doesn't have any issues with this."

PART 1 [END OF RECORDING]

PART 2 [START OF RECORDING]

MR. KABREL: For some reason, we have not been recording for the last ten minutes.

MR. LOWE: Okay. Alright.

MR. KABREL: So, that's unfortunate. However, I tracked it to when the phone died—one of our phones died—and it was right in the middle of the John Mitchell story. So, if we can just finish that story, and from there, we'll just go right into the Bush Library.

MR. LOWE: Okay. Sure. Sure. So, again, I was talking to Baker about his meeting with Nixon. Very strange meeting. He said, at the end, all about Baker's appointment to be Vice Chair of the Senate Watergate Committee—at the end, Baker just made kind of a casual comment, "I hope my friend John Mitchell doesn't have a problem with that issue." And Nixon said, "Well, he might." At that point, Baker said something inside of him snap, and Baker thought he should kind of let the chips fall where they may, as he always said, and figure out what, really, was the truth.

So, to me, one of the many, many lessons that Howard Baker taught me was kind of the importance of integrity in that regard. And again, I always joked that with the Baker lessons, I don't always follow them; I try to, but he was a good example of someone who was under an extraordinarily stressful situation. I mean, it doesn't get much more difficult than being right in the middle of Watergate, and having a President of your party being under attack for realizing that you've got to do the right thing for the country; you have to do the right thing by yourself, frankly, for your integrity, and follow the facts. And that's what he did, I think, that whole thing. So, I love the man. He was a great man, and I think we could all learn a lot from him.

MR. KABREL: Very good. Tell us about your experiences with the George W. Bush Presidential Library's director.

MR. LOWE: Sure. So, I got here in April of '09. We were in a temporary facility in Louisville, just north of here. A great temporary facility; staff of, I think, eight or nine when I got here. We're now around 40, if we have all the positions filled. Really interesting kind of beginning of figuring out, getting our arms around the collections. For me, it was a great learning experience, and as we talked about earlier, the predominance of the electronic collection here. A huge paper collection, but also, much larger electronic collection, and trying to figure out, how do you really deal with that?

So, hiring a staff, being part of the design process for the building, for the museum. I still remain very proud of our results from that effort. Working with great contractors, working with our Foundation. Working with the President and Mrs. Bush; I always say, it doesn't get much better for someone who loves history to be sitting in a meeting with the former President, and him saying, as we were designing the museum, he was saying, "Well, I was thinking this at that time," or, "My priorities were this," or, "This is why I did that." So, it doesn't get any better than that, and to be able to be part of that, I think, is very, very cool.

Getting the staff together, getting the building built, getting the museum built, and then beginning to see how do we work in this community. So, who are the obvious partners? Who are the partners who aren't as obvious that we need to reach out to and start working with? So, at the top of that list was SMU, and really getting deeply involved with them. They've been great in terms of welcoming us, but also, finding specific ways to work with us. So, for example, they created something called the Center for Presidential History, headed up by Dr. Jeffrey Engel, who's become a really good friend, one of my best friends here, that that center does oral histories as well as public programming. A lot of that public programming is done in partnership with us. So, it's become a great conduit into the academic life of the campus, and also, a great partner for us in reaching out to the broader community. So, it's been an amazing kind of whirlwind of an experience here. It doesn't feel like I've been here for seven years, but I think we've accomplished a lot in that time.

MR. KABREL: You talked about when you were executive director of the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center of Public Policy.

MR. LOWE: Yeah.

MR. KABREL: In the Bush Library, how much input did you have for that mission?

MR. LOWE: Well, you know, you come into this, and I've been part of this world for a while, and you know, here's a basic, core mission of this. And it's something that I have a great passion for, so, I know this is what we accomplish, or can accomplish, as a presidential library. What you need to do, then, is

say, "What am I either adding to that, or how am I magnifying that in this specific instance, right?" So, I know, for example, that we always talk about the importance of education at the presidential libraries.

What unique assets do we have to make it great; to really have an educational impact on our community and beyond? So, a good example of that here is, during the Bush administration, they renovated the situation room, and they gave us two rooms; they gave us the old conference room, and the old command room. The paneling, the furniture; all that came to us. So, we realized that would be a great educational resource. So, we reconstructed the conference room here; we reconstructed the Command Room at Reagan. And we got a grant a year and a half or so ago to connect the two rooms by technology, and to put together the first of what I hope are many simulations for kids to command and assume different roles, and have to solve a crisis together. It can be either a standalone exercise here at Bush, or we can connect with the kids at Reagan.

And I think, over time, we've talked to the Pentagon, to Mount Vernon, to connecting with them and doing other scenarios there as well. So again, that education thing was part of our core mission. I knew that, I bought into that, I love that, but then how do you really implement that here? What kind of unique way can you do it at Bush? Certainly, education of being connected to a great university, SMU, is another kind of unique asset we have here. So a big part of my thinking has been, how do I maximize that, and really, again, have the broadest and deepest impact, and education?

At Baker, I kind of had to, obviously, I had Senator Baker's input, and a great board at the university, but we really kind of had the formulaic vision there. And by the way, I also reached out, when I was with Baker, to the Center for Legislative Archives there at the National Archives—they were a terrific partner. And to the other congressional centers around the country. We all came together as an organization. So, I was able to help learn for them to craft a vision, but I would say it's more from scratch there than it was here. I was able to come into a program I knew, and respected, and wanted to move forward, but then you think, "How do I do it in this unique situation with George W. Bush?"

MR. KABREL: Can you talk a little about the email controversy, what happened?

MR. LOWE: In terms of the emails that they claimed were deleted and lost?

MR. KABREL: Yes.

MR. LOWE: Yeah. That was going on when I got here, and there had been claims that emails have been destroyed by the White House during the Bush administration. And again, I'm not Mr. Technology, but essentially, as it was explained to me was that it pretty much was how those emails were stored, and where they were stored, and what buckets they were in, and so forth. There was a resolution of that with the reconstructing of those lost emails from where they were found, and that was all done, litigation on that was resolved. And so, I think that was kind of symptomatic of coming into this new age of, how best do you preserve these, and how do you store them, how do you access them. I think a

learning thing for the White House and for us, but at the end of the day, we have them, and we have a lot of them.

MR. KABREL: Are there any stories that surround that incident, or other controversies in your ten years, or a little bit less?

MR. LOWE: Yeah. I'm trying to think. No more around that. I mean, that was pretty straightforward, frankly, of the people who have much more knowledge trying to sort out exactly where those emails had ended up, right? And then, going through with Gary Stern. We worked a lot with NARA's general counsel. I've known Gary for many, many years, and Chris Runkel has been one of my closest friends, and a great adviser. Working with those folks and their staff to try to figure all that out with the technology people. So, no other really big things around that. I'm trying to think of other controversies. Gosh, I hate to act like I'm controversy-free. That's boring. Nothing big, in terms of actual.

MR. KABREL: Well, the reason why I say that is because Bush's eight years could be considered controversial by many.

MR. LOWE: Well, yeah, of course.

MR. KABREL: A lot has happened. I was just wondering if any of that has transferred over into the library?

MR. LOWE: I appreciate your clarifying, but at this point, I'm way too NARA-centric here, so you're right. First of all, I think there was some controversy here when I first arrived that some faculty members at SMU had opposed the library being here. And I think you're going to find that, pretty much anywhere in the country, no matter what the political party there will be opposition to these institutions sometimes. I think that this really comes from a misunderstanding of what we're about, and not understanding, I'll try to say this in a humble way, of what we bring to a community. I think we bring a lot to a community. And luckily here, the vast majority of SMU faculty and supporters and people in this area understood that it's going to be a good thing to have the Bush Library here, no matter if you're a Democrat, Republican, Independent, whatever.

I considered it a big part of my job when I got here to reach out and kind of dive into the SMU community, so that whether they were a supporter or not a supporter, that they understood, "Here's what a presidential library really does, and here's why I think it would be good for us to be here, and how we want to work with you guys, and how I want to be helpful to you guys." So, I really immediately started working with the management of SMU, and faculty, and going out and speaking, either in classes—I remember, I went to the home of one of the faculty members, and he brought in a bunch of current and former faculty to hear me talk. And it was constantly going around with that, trying to say, "This is a good thing." Right? And I don't want to overstate the level of opposition. I mean, they were already going to raise the sign, the building; we knew it was going to be here. Almost everyone I talked to there was supportive, but there was still kind of this small set of folks who were upset about it.

I think what I did, what I thought other people did, getting out in the community, that pretty much went away. So, in terms of the broader controversial nature of the Bush administration, obviously, huge debates during the administration about a whole range of things: response, the war on terror, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Katrina, the financial crisis. I mean, you think about what this guy had to deal with over those eight years, an amazing number of difficult issues, challenges. And of course, as with any presidency, people disagreeing with what he did, how he did it, and some people very much agreeing with it. Ours were magnified, I think, because the issues were so huge. So, to me, that was a great opportunity to talk about history, and to talk about how presidents, how leaders, operate. And I will give President Bush and his folks a lot of credit.

As we put the museum together, he was at the top of the list, saying, "You need to talk about the controversies, and the different viewpoints." Now, of course, sometimes, presidential libraries are treated unfairly, or hit on the head for being temples, and only saying good things about their presidents. I always say, first of all, I liked having a President in the room, and telling me what he was thinking. And I think it is important in these museums to say, "We are the Bush Library. And here—the President thought these were his priorities, and the big things he accomplished then—that informed us as we put this museum together."

But at the same time, with something like our Decision Points data, for example, we also show the other sides of those debates. So, in Decision Points—I don't know if you're familiar with that. You go in—it's like a theater—and you have this individual computer screens, and a big screen up front. And you had to go in and choose from one of four scenarios with your compatriots in the room; majority rules. And you choose from either the invasion of Iraq, the surge in Iraq, the response to the financial crisis, or the response to Hurricane Katrina. Four big, controversial topics. And after you choose the scenario, on your individual computer screen, you choose to get advice from different sources. So, it might be the Pentagon, or Congress, or whatever. And in each of those sources, two different actors come up and give you completely conflicting advice. So, if you pick up the surge, one of them will come up, say, from the Pentagon, and say, "This is why you need to send more troops in, and you need to do it right away, and here's how it will work." And then, the other actor will come up and say, "In no way you should send more troops, and here's why." So, that way we're able to, basically, kind of frame those debates, and people have to disagree or agree.

Along, on the way, you get flashing news bulletins trying to sway your opinion. At the end, you make a final decision. You see how the room voted, what option they picked, and then the President comes up and says, "This is what I did, and why I did it." So, you get to see those debates, but also, more fundamentally, you get to see that any leader has to take in a lot of conflicting information. They have to sift through it, they have to apply their principles, and make decisions. You may vehemently disagree with those decisions or you may love them, but at the end of the day, that leader is responsible for doing it. So, it teaches a lot of lessons and takes on those controversies.

There was another film we did with Secretary Rice about some of the controversies of the War on Terror rendition, and that kind of stuff as well. So, we wanted to kind of address that straightforwardly. And certainly, in terms of our archives, free access to that, our educational program is always nonpartisan. So, I think we do a really good job of not being political, and talking about those pretty contentious issues that were around during the Bush administration.

MR. KABREL: So, you feel that in your experience with presidential libraries, that for the most part, they're an honest assessment of history?

MR. LOWE: Yeah, I think it is. And you know, it's always the balancing act, because you do want to not make it a hatchet-job, right? So, you don't want to go in and say, "Well, we're going to only show the critics." Right? You don't want to do that, but at the same time, you want to show that there were critics, and that there were debates on these certain issues. So, it is kind of a little bit of a balancing act in exactly how you do that. I think we were really very much helped here by having a really terrific museum design firm called PRD. They always brought us, made sure we were at a good space in terms of how a professional museum exhibit should be put together, right? So, we can have discussions, "Well, how do we do this? How do we approach this issue? Do we approach this issue? What do we do? What's going to make for a good visitor experience? How does it tie into what we do with education?" All those things.

And Dan Murphy and his gang there at PRD would help us kind of move down that road in a very good, professional way. But again, I've got to state, and I'm not just blowing smoke here, that our Foundation friends who ran those meetings wanted a good museum. They didn't want people to come in and say, "Oh, it's just a glorification thing." Obviously, we do talk about the accomplishments of the Bush administration; we do talk about his priorities. But at the same time, I think we do it in a very professionally, I'm trying to think, not in a museum way, but in a professionally-designed way that I think people on both sides of the political aisle can respect.

MR. KABREL: So, you would feel that in all of your experiences in the presidential libraries—and you don't have to be specific here. That there was no real political pressure to water down or to alter points of view?

MR. LOWE: No, and I will stay away from Nixon on that, though. The whole Nixon issue through the years has been difficult from the ongoing litigation that was going on from the seventies to the early two thousands; the difficult relationship that resulted from that, understandably. And I think I always try to put myself in other people's shoes, seeing both sides of those debates during the years, and of course, how you deal with Watergate. So, I will put that aside. I have great respect for our director over at Nixon; I have a great respect for the Nixon Foundation. Aside from that, I think there's always an honest effort to put together a good museum.

I remember, at Roosevelt, as we thought about, "In the future we're going to redo this museum..." So, they finally did. It took a while to get all that together, but it's great, from what I hear; I haven't seen it

yet. But you know, I thought, how do we best approach the issue of, say, FDR and the Holocaust, right? And how do we deal with that now? Because there obviously are different opinions on that. I'm not sure, exactly, how they ended up doing that. But that is a discussion you have to have, and you have to think about among yourselves, with the Foundation, with the families and so forth, "How do we do this in a way that will be well done, that can kind of talk about that there is a discussion around this topic without being just a hatchet job that some people might want it to be?"

So, I haven't really, in all my time, I think that you do work closely with the foundation. I think that what happens, oftentimes, is it doesn't matter what party you are; if you're a very partisan person and you see, okay, so let's say you're a very staunch Republican, and you see a Democratic presidential library open, it's almost like a reaction nowadays, that you're going to go in and just assume that it's a temple to that Democratic president, and vice versa, the other way. And some people are just going to be that way. I've kind of had to learn in my career just to accept that there's going to be a certain percentage that's going to think that way, when I know that the process behind it is not like that at all, and we just kind of have to stand on the record; stand on the fact that we have people coming in here who are Democrats, who love this museum, and know that we've been successful. And if you have detractors, then you just have detractors, and hope that they will see the light.

MR. KABREL: How much does a revisionist history play a role? Like, you were saying about FDR and the Holocaust, or maybe any controversy on?

MR. LOWE: I think you have to think about, particularly, with the older libraries, I think it's important when you go into those redesign efforts to see, what is the current state of scholarship, what are the top things that historians are talking about now, what new discoveries have been made in your archives, or others that might inform it. But that doesn't do away entirely with the old. I mean, I think revisionist history is only new until it's revised, right?

So, I think you don't want to jump on something that is some new fad or something; you want it to be good, and scholarly, and supported, and so forth. You know? But if it is, I think you have to incorporate it into your thinking, about how do you talk about whatever this topic is? So, I think it's important to that. And I know, any good museum designer is going to do that. They're going to do the research and realize these are things that we need to at least be thinking about.

MR. KABREL: As we're wrapping up here, I'd like to just ask you any final thoughts on your current position, and anything else you'd like to state about your position as director of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum?

MR. LOWE: Sure. Well, I guess I would be amiss if I didn't say that it's been a very special experience to work with George W. Bush and Laura Bush. They're very good people, very supportive of what we do here. It's very interesting to work with a first lady who had been a teacher and a librarian, you know? So, she brings to us a set of skills that are pretty awesome. And getting to know them the way I have, it's one of those great experiences NARA has allowed me to have, to kind of get to know these people that

led our nation, and to see that they are people. I think it's very easy in this day and age, in really difficult political times, to almost dehumanize our political leaders in some way, and forget that they're human beings. These guys have shown me they really are, they have a great sense of humor, they have great sympathy and empathy, and are just really rock-solid people. So, I guess that's just the final word, that I've been very, very blessed to be able to get to know them, and their family, and their associates. I won't have that opportunity at Lincoln, obviously, but there, at least, like we have here, they have a really good Foundation. And again, those lessons from Baker and from here about how to work with those foundations are going to be valuable to me up there in Illinois.

MR. KABREL: Without a doubt. Just to go along the line that you were previously on, are there any stories or anything else you'd like to see on the various presidents, or individually, with them in the cabinet, before we leave this topic?

MR. LOWE: Well, you know, I've gotten to know some of the folks here who work for George W. Bush. Andy Card is a really great guy; Josh Bolton. Karl Rove has been around here quite a bit. Really funny guy; I think I love his sense of humor. Margaret Spellings, you know, was Secretary of Education for President Bush, and head of the foundation here. And I really grew to like Margaret so much. She was a lot of fun to be around, but so smart, and really did a great job at the Foundation. I could not have asked for a better partner over there; and again, a great sense of humor as well. So, we got along perfectly. I'm trying to think, who else?

Secretary Rice. So impressive; has been here a lot, did a good amount of research here, too, has been involved in the Bush Institute, and is such a good and kind person. So, getting to know her a little bit. Let me think. I shouldn't—my brain is starting to get a little fried here. Those are a lot of the people we worked with who are part of the Bush administration. And I'm sure I'm forgetting many, many more. But it's, again, interesting to see the kind of teams these folks put together, and the team that President Bush put together.

Mrs. Bush had great people. I mean, Anita McBride, one of the first people I met during the interview process, has been very engaged with us; just a great person, a lot of fun to work with as well. And then you see, some of those guys come down. Brian Cossiboom is the Vice President for Operations here. He had a role in the White House, and brought a lot of knowledge to this position, but it's just been a rock for us. Someone I talk to, pretty much every day. And again, it may be a constant; you may see this interview as, I like to laugh. I do. And I think a sense of humor, Baker helped reinforce this for me, a sense of humor makes the day go by much easier, and resolve issues. And Brian and his compatriots over there know how to laugh, for sure, so it's been a lot of fun working with him.

MR. KABREL: And seeing forward to your next position, what lessons do you think that you've learned that you could take back?

MR. LOWE: Gosh. You know, the Lincoln Library is an awesome place already. I think I'm going to go up there with a real commitment, first of all, to education, and seeing what we're doing now, and what

more we can do. I've become a real believer here in the role of simulations, you know, and in kind of that interactive-type, immersive experience and education; seeing if they're doing that already, and if they're not, what can we do at Lincoln. Really, a real passion for education. I think I've learned a lot here in museums; especially, the exhibit program here has been very active, and I've been very engaged with that with our curator and our Foundation. I think I've learned more and more each time we've done an exhibit, on what works and what doesn't work, and how to really engage people the best. So, I think I want to go up and take a good look at what we're doing there with special exhibits.

They've done some great ones already, but what we can do even better. Programming, same thing, how important it is. Springfield is a pretty small community, but they have a great buy-in from the citizens of Springfield and the county. So, what can we do even better to reach them, and to reach other areas around there and around the state. And then archives, they have a terrific Lincoln collection, but it needs to be grown, and we need to think about, "How do we do that?" Then, lastly, I know I'm a broken record, but the partnerships and dealing with the foundation. So, how do we maximize that partnership? How do we work together to raise money and to support the programs that kind of form our core mission together? So, I think I take a lot of what I've learned here and at Baker, and hopefully, we'll put it to good use up there.

MR. KABREL: Great. Are there any last words or stories you would like to add to your interview before I have one final question?

MR. LOWE: No, just that I appreciate NARA. Again, I came into this agency in '89 not knowing a whole heck of a lot about it, and certainly, not knowing anything about presidential libraries. I will say that I believe deeply in what presidential libraries do, and all range of our missions. I'm really proud of what the libraries have been able to accomplish around the country. I think we're a real force for education, for the preservation of history, and I know I'm a bit biased, but I think we're a great part of the federal government. So, I'm very, very proud of what we've done. I'm very appreciative of all the opportunities I've been given.

MR. KABREL: And then, my final question is, going back to 1990, 1989, when you were standing there in front of Ronald Reagan all by yourself, if you had the opportunity again, what would you ask him?

MR. LOWE: I think one thing is, I would say, "Why did you decide to go into public service? What was that final thing that pushed you into that arena?" And I think that would be a really interesting question to ask him. I've studied his life a lot, and I know that transition from being an actor, very involved in the Screen Actors' Guild, obviously, so very political in that regard. But what made that step to the Rendezvous with Destiny Speech, and the decision to run for governor. I think that would be really fascinating to talk to him about.

The other, I think, and I've read more and more, obviously then, but since then, about his views on the Cold War. It's a great debate. Did Reagan win the Cold War? Did he not? My good friend at SMU, Jeff Engel, Center for Presidential History, is a big fan of H.W. Bush and Gorbachev, and he thinks that those

two things together really did it in. And I'm very much, the more I study Reagan, you see the consistency of his thoughts on the Soviet Union, and on the Cold War, and how to win that Cold War. Right? So, you can go back and see a progression of thought, and then an implementation of that thought. So, obviously Reagan has detractors; he has supporters. I put myself in the latter. I'm definitely a supporter.

And I would love to talk to him about, "When you were president, how did you, on a day-to-day, or a month-to-month basis move your vision to reality? Because Reagan presumed that this picture of, "Here's how we do this," and then you see it being implemented, but his specific role is still being debated. Was he there day by day, saying this and that? Or was it just setting him a vision and these guys implementing it? Or, some detractors would say that they didn't even implement it; they did what they could, and then, really, Gorbachev was the one who really ended the Cold War. That debate is so hot right now. I think it would be interesting to sit down with him and say, "Tell me, sir, how exactly did this work?" So many things like that. I think he's endlessly fascinating, and obviously, one of the most important presidents of the 20th century.

MR. KABREL: Well, Alan, thank you very much. I really appreciate our time, and you are a living example of somebody who started out with a vision, to reality; from Reagan to Lincoln.

MR. LOWE: Thank you so much. I've enjoyed it. Let me know if you need anything else, and come see us in Illinois.

MR. KABREL: I definitely will, and if there's anything you want to add to the record, by all means, I'll drop everything to get it.

MR. LOWE: You're too good. I appreciate it. Thank you so much, sir.

PART 2 [END OF RECORDING]





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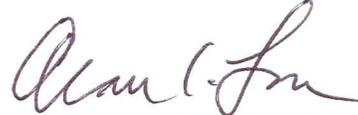
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