U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview
Subject: Warren Finch
Interviewer: Stephanie Reynolds
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Stephanie Reynolds: All right. Well, let me start out with saying thank you for participating in the National Archives Oral History Project. We're documenting the history of the agency by preserving firsthand accounts of events. My name is Stephanie Reynolds, and I'm based out of the National Archives and Records Administration Building (or NARA for short) in Denver, Colorado. I'm assisting the agency historian, Jessie Kratz, in this important endeavor. Today is Wednesday, May 24th, 2023, and I'm speaking with Warren Finch, who has had a long and illustrious career with NARA's Presidential Libraries. Okay, Warren, to get us started, can you please just tell us a little bit about your background, like where you grew up, your educational background, what you were doing before you joined the National Archives?

Warren Finch: So I grew up in Mobile, Alabama, got my undergraduate degree from the University of South Alabama—a school in Mobile—and I got a master's in history with, kind of, British history, 18th century—so, I'm an expert at a topic no one really gives a hoot about—but 18th-century English history at Auburn University. So my professor at Auburn University—that was his background—was in British history during the 18th century. So that's what I studied. And then, I got my degree, taught for a little bit, and then in March of—that would have been '89—I got a job working for Doug Thurman as an archives technician in Washington, DC, and so we can talk about how that happened, if you would like. And then, um—.

Stephanie: Sure.

Warren: So I had two office mates at Auburn; one was Mary Kloser. And she, Mary,—actually Auburn—had an archives degree. You get a degree in archives from the history department, and so the Carter Library—I don't know, the Carter Library is maybe less than an hour, maybe it's an hour—from Auburn. So Mary did an internship at the Carter Library in Atlanta as part of her archives program, and then got a job at the National Archives working for a gentleman named Doug Thurman. And our other office mate, who I mentioned, Kari Gleemaker, got married in North Carolina around Christmas time. And my wife—or Mary Kloser— came to the wedding, and I came from Mobile to the wedding because we had remained very good friends with Kari, and there was a job opening in Doug Thurmond's office, and Mary Kloser asked me if I'd be interested in applying, and I said I would, and I did.

And back then, NARA's personnel office was very, very good—uh, Kathy Elmstead. I came to the National Archives, actually interviewed for the job. I think Doug thought I was out of my mind

for flying all the way from Mobile, Alabama, to Washington, DC, to interview for, I think, it was a GS-4 position. I took the post office civil service exam, which I passed with mediocrity. It was really hard getting all those—picking out all those numbers. Anyway, so in March, I was offered a job and I started, I think, March 13th, 1989. Mary Kloser, who helped me get the interview, eventually became Mary Finch. And so I worked for Doug. Doug was a good boss. Very, very good boss. He was good about promoting—getting his employees promoted. And so the Reagan Library opened up not long after I started, and I had a master's degree in history at the time. And he helped me get a position as an archivist in California. So Ms. Kloser and I got engaged about two weeks before I left for California. And Doug Thurman—she worked for Doug still, and I was in California for about a year—and he was helpful in getting me a job back in DC so I could be close to the person I was marrying.

Stephanie: That's nice.

Warren: So my wife always takes credit for giving me the job at NARA, which is true. And then I worked on the Nixon Contested Review for a while. And there was a guy named Dave Alsobrook who worked over at the Executive Office Building (EOB) during the Bush administration helping. He worked for NARA. He had been the supervisory archivist at Carter [Library], but he was working at the EOB helping the National Archives understand the records that were—Bush was retiring, and Mary worked on the A/V [audiovisual] collection for both Reagan and Bush. And so when Bush left office, Dave Alsobrook also asked if we would be interested in coming to College Station. And, I think, I came on January 1st, 1993. I was the first employee in College Station. And we were going to be here for a couple of years. Thirty years later, actually, we're still here. So that's, you know, we can get into details, but that's a little thumbnail. So I was a supervisory archivist. I was an archivist, supervisory archivist. Dave Alsobrook left and went to Clinton [Library]. A very good guy came to Bush, Doug Menarchik, and he was very good to me. I was his deputy. And when he decided to go back into security after 9/11, he recommended me for the job. And I was director for 18 years, from December 26th, 2004, until I retired on December—when did I retire? December the 3rd or the 4th? I can't remember now—of 2022. So I've been retired for just [counting the months]—I've been retired for about five months, a little over five months. So that's in a nutshell.

Stephanie: Wow, that's a lot in a nutshell, right?

Warren: Yeah.

Stephanie: You've just had a long career with the Archives. Can you tell me what division or program that you were in when you first came to the National Archives?

Warren: So I've always been in Presidential Libraries.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: When I was in the Presidential Libraries,—the office is much different today than it was when I started there—there was a central office. I'm not sure the central office of Presidential Libraries really exists in much of the way it did when I started. But I began working for Doug, and our job was—Doug Thurman—and our job with Doug Thurman was to bring the gifts over. So the White House would call once a week, once every other week, and we'd go over and pick up the Presidential gifts and bring them back to the National Archives and wrap them, for lack of a catalog, for eventual deposit in the Presidential Library. We also worked with the audiovisual materials that were being retired, because they ran out of space pretty quickly at the Executive Office Building where the records were stored at the time. So we would go pick up gifts, we'd pick up audiovisual material, and then we'd do whatever else needed to be done. And so that's the job I started in. We would—if a visitor from, let's say, France was coming and we had collected some French gifts, French state gifts, we'd unpack them and take them back over to the White House.

I worked a lot with Bush Vice Presidential records. And so they kind of became my domain—Bush Vice Presidential records. So if the administration had done something during the eight years of the VP [Vice President], and they were kind of doing something, and they wanted to see how they'd done it in the VP years, they would call, and I would be the guy that would take the records back over to the White House—the VP records—and let them look at them and see what they had done. And we also picked up a lot of stuff. So we did that kind of thing.

So I've always been in Presidential Libraries. I worked for Doug. And then when I came back, I worked for Pat Borders and Nancy Smith upstairs. And for the—kind of helped him—run the administration of all the Presidential Libraries and worked on the VP stuff a lot.

Stephanie: Okay. Wow. What a remarkable start to a career to go right in and work with those Presidential records and gifts.

Warren: It was a nice career.

Stephanie: What did you think of all of that? I mean, just starting out?

Warren: Well, it was nice. You know, DC is a great place for young people. And I was still pretty young at the time, before children, so it was pretty exciting. Mary, before our marriage, had a roommate and lived out in Sterling. And I had rented a room in a house out in Sterling. After we got married, we actually moved into the District [of Columbia]. That was a time when the District was very much transitioning, and parts of the city still were very unsafe. But ours was. But we took every opportunity to go to concerts, see all the museums, you know, apple festivals, and gosh, we did a lot. We did something almost every weekend and almost every evening, and took advantage of the city; it was great. And we did a lot of the program.

The National Archives, the old building downtown, used to have this wonderful, wonderful, wonderful theater. They used to show a lot of Frank Capra. The National Archives had a—part of

their collection—they had gotten a—oh, shoot, I can't remember—one of the news service companies, one of the companies that own the newsreels—Ed Herlihy was the narrator. Anyway, they would play those a lot and they would do things like Frank Capra. They would show a Frank Capra film every week for the summer. So everything from his silent movies, all the way through, you know, the 40s and 50s. So we did. We kept very busy. Very, very busy. A lot of authors and book collectors and stuff like that.

Stephanie: So a big change then from Mobile, Alabama?

Warren: Yeah. Yeah. A big change. Yes.

Stephanie: Do you have any—[CROSS-TALKING]. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Warren: No, you go ahead.

Stephanie: I was just going to ask if the National Archives gave you any job training for your positions?

Warren: So, they used to have a program. When I became an archivist, they had a program that was called CIDS: Career [thinking of acronym] Development—I can't—"C-I-D-S"—career intern—no, I don't remember. But it was a two-week course that all new archivists went through. I was in California when I joined the program. I ended up doing a paper on an obsolete electronic records system that the Bush White House had called “PROFS,” which actually became a big deal at the end of the administration because—should it be deleted or were they a record that was—anyway, neither here nor there. So give me the question again, because I've already—.

Stephanie: Sure. Any job training that—.

Warren: So, yeah, yeah. So the Career Intern Development Series [CIDS] was a two-week course we all took. And then we worked on a—we had a deadline a year after we began it—we had to submit a paper, and the course was okay. The real value of the course was that you got to meet all the archivists at the National Archives, who had just been hired along with you. And so I always said that. The course actually ended up going away. I always thought the course was very, very valuable because you got to meet all these archivists, and then you continued your career with this bunch of colleagues. And you always kept up with what they were doing. And sometimes you ended up working—well, I did—I worked with several of them over the years, several of my CIDS colleagues over the years. So it was—the content of the course was fine. You went around to a lot of National Archives facilities in DC, and cartographics, and et cetera. But the real value of the course, what you got for two weeks, you got to know these colleagues of yours that were joining the National Archives as archivists at the same time. That was the real value, of course. So that was the training, and there was a paper involved before you could be promoted from a [GS-] 7 to a 9. It was a 7/9/11 career ladder. I think it's now a career ladder 7/9/11/12.

Stephanie: Okay. And then how long were you doing that before you went to the Reagan Library?

Warren: So, I became an archivist. When I went out to Reagan, I was hired as an archivist at Reagan. So I was hired in March as a technician, as a GS-4 or -5. I can't remember. I was promoted after 90 days and then still as a technician. And then in—March, April, May, June, July, August—so I think about five months later, in August, I applied for the job, the archivist position at Reagan. And, I think, in August, I went to California, and I stayed in California for one year.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: And then that would have made me a GS-7—that would have made me a GS-9, probably. And I came back to DC and went to work for Pat Borders, Nancy Smith, and John Fawcett, who was the head of the office.

Stephanie: Well, going back to the Reagan Library, what were your responsibilities there?

Warren: So we were just starting up. We would go to the— what's the movie with—? Oh, shoot. The movie with Bruce Willis. Reagan's office was in the same movie that the Bruce Willis film was made, you know, where they blow up the building and all that.

Stephanie: Like a *Die Hard* movie?

Warren: *Die Hard*. The movie *Die Hard* was filmed as that building was being built. So, anyway, after the building was built, Reagan's office, post-Presidential office, was there, and he still got gifts. So we would go get the gifts. And they were still answering correspondence. And so we would look in our files—you know, someone wrote to us six weeks ago or six months ago when Reagan was still President, and he'd written to us again, and we need to find out what our response to him was six months ago. And we would look it up in the files, and we would make a copy and either fax it over there or take it over there. So we did that, and we also began processing the Presidential records. I think I worked on a couple different files, which I cannot remember anymore, but we began processing those records—and they were all paper records back then—and trying to make them—. We had five years, I believe, where we were exempt from the FOIA [Freedom of Information Act]. Actually, it was called the Presidential Records Act. We had five years. And so we tried to process as many of the records as we could to make them available for opening when the five-year window went away. So I was part of that team that worked on processing records.

Stephanie: Wow.
Warren: It was fun. It was fun. I lived in Culver—. The building was in the old—I'm not sure the building still exists—but it's typical California. It was a great California experience for me. I lived in Culver City, right across the street from what had been the MGM headquarters. It was then

Lorimar and, I think, later became Sony headquarters. But we were in a building that had been A-1 Pasta Factory, and they had made pasta there. And in the same building with us was the dealership, an automotive repair shop that worked on Bentleys. And that was kind of fun. And then *Tales from the Crypt* was filmed above us. And one night, in 1989, at the end of the season, there was a wrap party. The production company had a wrap party, and there was a lot of ice, and they left the ice apparently on the roof, and it all leaked through the roof and into our stack area. And we were very, very lucky nothing got damaged, but we were also very, very—not very, very happy. But it was on Venice Boulevard, and we were about, I don't know, two or three miles from Venice Beach. So it's very—it was very California-ish.

Stephanie: Yes.

Warren: And Culver City, apparently, has changed quite a bit since then. But I lived there for—I lived in a small—a woman-owned house, and she had built a mother-in-law apartment for her mother, and her mother had died. And she rented the little apartment to me.

Stephanie: Wow. Connections, right?

Warren: Yeah. I was working for the Reagan Library. She was part of the local Los Angeles Democratic Party Committee. And she was always trying to save me. And I always tried to point out to her that I worked for the National Archives. This was a nonpartisan, nonpolitical job. But I don't think she ever really believed me.

Stephanie: Right. I know we get that, don't we? Yeah. Does anything really stick out in your mind from your time at the Reagan Library?

Warren: So, you know, it was new. There were some staff there I kept up with through my entire career. A guy named Alan Lowe and I got to be good friends. And then a couple other people—. I don't know that many of them are still with NARA. But it was new, and it was exciting. It was starting a brand-new library. The building was still just going up, up north of us in Simi Valley. And it was kind of, for a historian, a dream come true, working with original records, original audiovisual material, and original 3D artifacts. I mean, what else would a historian want to do? And young—it was exciting. And most of us were all newly hired, fresh out of history departments around the country. And it was California, which is something I was not used to. It is different out there on the West Coast than it is in most other parts of the country. I was the only person, because I was poor, that actually walked to places. So I walked everywhere I went, and I was just about the only one out there that didn't drive. But, you know, we went to Beverly Hills. There was a little golf course, a little nine-hole golf course up there. We played golf up there, and we went to the beach. I, coming from Mobile, love the beach. So we went to Venice Beach a few times. The water is very, very cold in California, unlike the Gulf of Mexico, where the water is very, very warm. Water is very, very cold in California. But I enjoyed my time out there. We went to San Diego. I got to be good friends with Alan Lowe and his wife at the time. And we did a lot of, you know, Disneyland. We went to Universal. We went down to San Diego.

We did a lot of traveling. We went to wine country. We just had a great time. And it was a great part of my career.

Stephanie: Sounds like you really did a lot of things there. So then how did you get back to the DC area?

Warren: So, they needed someone. So, of course, I was getting married, and there was a position in DC to work on Nixon Contested Review. So the National Archives had seized most of Nixon's Presidential records, and Nixon had made an argument that within those seized records, some were purely private and non-Presidential, so they didn't meet his constitutional, statutory or ceremonial role, or they were not evidence of Watergate. So, they had someone that would go—as we propose records for opening or as we looked at records, they had someone who would go—they had a representative go through those records and say this record or that record wasn't part of his constitutional, statutory, ceremonial role and wasn't evidence of Watergate, and that they should be personal, not part of the collection.

And so one of my jobs was to look at those records that had been deemed—that the representative had—. There was one other person working on the staff, who was working for Nancy Smith at the time. And we would go through those records and decide whether they were indeed constitutional, statutory or ceremonial, or whether they were Watergate. And then, I think, they wanted something maybe, I can't remember correctly, but there was something about personal material, you know. You close something that might cause someone embarrassment. And I remember there was a transcript or something, I guess it was, or I can't remember. And they wanted to close it, because Kissinger was calling someone what they thought read as "booger." And I made the argument that he wasn't calling him a "booger." He was calling him a "bugger." And that the record had to be opened, because he was referring to someone not as a "booger." It wasn't a derogatory term. He was referring to someone as a "bugger." He was bugging people. In other words, you know, he was taping the conversation. So, that was one of the things I remember, but I did that for a little while. And then, at some point, and I can't remember when, I started working on the VP stuff, which was a much more fun job, working on the VP stuff. Although I must have done them both at the same time, I guess. They were both very interesting jobs. The Nixon project, at the time, was outside of DC, somewhere near Alexandria, Virginia, at a warehouse complex. And that's where the stuff was temporarily stored before it was moved to California. So, I worked for that staff, but I mostly worked at the National Archives building in DC.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: –which was nice because I lived up on, I think, 17th Street Southeast? Southwest? Halfway between the Capitol and what was RFK [Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium] at the time. I don't know if RFK Stadium still exists.

Stephanie: I don't think it does, but I'm not 100% sure.

Warren: But, anyway, I lived up across the street from Lincoln Park, which was this nice little park in DC. I lived in the basement of a brownstone that was owned by a woman named Fynnette Eaton, who worked for the National Archives. And so Mary and I rented her basement.

Stephanie: Wow, that's neat. Okay, and you said the Vice Presidential records then were also really neat. Can you tell me more about that?

Warren: Yeah. So these were records that had been retired to the National Archives after Bush became President. So there was only so much room in the White House, which we learned. So, at that point, the White House Office of Records Management was located in the Executive Office Building. I think it's now in the new EOB. But at that time, it was in the old EOB, which is that very beautiful Victorian building that's next door to the White House, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. It's called the "Old EOB." And they built a new building, kind of down across the street or down the street, and it was called the "NEOB" [New Executive Office Building], but it's also called the "Eisenhower" [Executive Office Building (EEOB)]. It was a beautiful building, and it had these great stained glass windows in it. My gosh, it was a beautiful building. So, they didn't have much room, because there were a lot of offices in that building. Records Management didn't have a lot of room. They periodically boxed records and sent them to the National Archives. And one of the collections they sent over was the VP records, because they needed to make room for the Presidential records. So, as I said, anytime the White House needed precedent on how they had done something during the VP years, they would call, and I would go search for the records. And I'm not sure there was actually a very good database of those records at the time. So, I think we used paper inventories, and we made our best guess at where something might be located. Sometimes, it was very, very easy to do; sometimes it was not so easy. And we would take them back to the White House and give them to whoever needed them. Sometimes, we'd take them straight to Records Management, and then other times, we'd actually go to the office within the Executive Office Building for the person who needed them, and then make sure we got them back. Of course, we receded everything. And we also—if something needed picking up in DC, or around DC, we went and picked it up. We did a lot of picking up, a lot of records. We picked up records for—there was a great lady who lived near the National Zoo, and she had a Chinese export porcelain collection, and she had known Hoover, I guess, and Hoover was known for his collection of Chinese export porcelain. And so, I remember going out to Rock Creek and picking up all of her stuff and taking it back. And then we would go to Rock Creek Parkway. Have you ever lived in DC?

Stephanie: I did for about five years.

Warren: So, Rock Creek Parkway. So when I was there in 1989, '90, '91, there were these congressional widows who had bought houses in the 1930s, 1940s in Rock Creek. There were a few in Rock Creek, and they were deciding that it was time to move back to Iowa, Kansas. And they had—it was just, you know, they had bought these houses for 35,000 dollars, 40,000 dollars, and they were now worth a gazillion dollars. And so we'd go pick up stuff from congressional widows and box it up and bring it back to the National Archives. And they would

donate the collection either to the National Archives or to a Presidential Library. But we often just did a lot of picking up here and there.

We picked up records from Stu Eizenstat, who lived in DC. He had worked for the Carter administration. I remember we went and picked up his records and shipped them to the Carter Library. So, we did a lot of that kind of stuff. We did a lot of grunt work. I transferred—one of my fun things to do was GE [General Electric] Theater. So, there was a program called GE Theater, and Ronald Reagan was the host, and we had all of it on film. And I took it and transferred it from film to video. And we sent it all to Reagan, which is kind of an interesting story.

So, when I was working for Nixon [Library], they had two-reel videotape, two-inch videotape—called two-inch videotape, because it was two inches wide—and it was open-reel. So you had a reel on one side and a reel on the other side, and it passed through a head that read it. And it was the system that was used during the Nixon administration. It was state of the art, and the Nixon project took three RCA two-inch machines and took the parts and made two that ran. And so, almost all day long, a guy took the two-inch videotape, and they transferred it to three-inch, three-quarter-inch videotape, which was a closed-cassette videotape. Well, three-quarter-inch videotape became obsolete during the Bush administration. And I don't know what they did, but at Bush [Library]—Bush started off with three-quarter-inch and went to Betacam, and Betacam is now obsolete. It's all digital. So, that's the story of the National Archives trying to keep up with technology. But, anyway, I enjoyed my time. I enjoyed my time, but I did a lot of things, something new every day.

Stephanie: And then you're thinking—[CROSS-TALKING]. Go ahead.

Warren: Doug Thurman was about 10 years older than me. He became a mentor for me. We got to be very, very good friends. And he's the godfather for my middle child. Anyway, we got to be very, very good friends.

Stephanie: Oh, wow. That's great. That's lovely. Yeah. So it sounds like when you got back to DC, you were working not just with Bush and Reagan records, you were also going to different places around the area to pick up other artifacts or records for other locations.

Warren: It seems like, to me, almost not on a daily basis, but maybe two or three times a week, you know—that's 30 years ago, and it's hard to remember—but, it seems like, to me, we were going down to the motor pool to get the government van to go pick up records, maybe two or three times a week. We got to be so common that the woman who ran the motor pool would see us coming and would almost have the keys waiting for us—Dottie Carpenter. And we were always going someplace to pick up something or take something back—RNC [Republican National Committee] records, DNC [Democratic National Committee] records. We had a lot of stuff, and the office I worked in was called "2W2," and it was a stack area, and the ceiling was about, maybe, six-feet tall. And that stack area is now part of the exhibit. It was all taken out along with the beautiful—a big regret was that the beautiful theater that was up on the sixth floor, the fifth floor, was also taken out. So you had a combination on the door, and you could

only get in the office by using the combination. Anyway, we had a lot of stuff. We had a lot, a lot, a lot of stuff.

Stephanie: I bet. Wow. So, okay, so you went from there, and then how did you get on to the assignment for moving the Presidential records now of George H. W. Bush?

Warren: There you go. So, I told you about David Alsobrook, who came from the Carter Library, who was working over in the Executive Office Building. Some of the VP requests for records came through him to the National Archives and to me. So, the time that I was there, we got to know each other. We were both Auburn graduates. He had his master's and his Ph.D. from Auburn, in history, and—. So, during the Gulf War, Bush looked like he was unbeatable, and then the economy and whatever. Clinton was just, you know, Clinton was a great candidate. And it was clear in about June or July that, well, yeah, everybody at the National Archives began to wonder, "if Bush loses, what are we going to do?" But you can't, you know, the guy that is the head of the agency is the President. It's an executive department agency. So, you don't go to the White House and say, "yeah, when this guy loses in a couple of months..." So, anyway, President Bush lost, and there was a desperate need to get archivists into—because back then, records were paper, photographs were on negatives, video was on videotape, and artifacts were three-dimensional—and there was a big need to get people into the Executive Office Building, where most of the records were stored in offices, and the White House as quickly as possible, find out how much was in there, get it packed and get it moved, and get it out by January 20th, so that when Clinton came, assumed the Presidency, there were no records left in the White House. So, almost right after the election, within days, we all moved—a whole group, a whole team of National Archives people—moved into the Executive Office Building. I think we officed out of Records Management and began going through the Executive Office Building and White House to the offices that were there, that had records. We'd open up file cabinets, see how many records were there, how many boxes we were going to need. And then we began boxing up records, palletizing them, and putting them on pallets in the hallways of the Old Executive Office Building. So, they started to talk about, "well, you know, we've got to send somebody to this place called College Station." And I was asked if I would be interested in going to College Station, and I was. I thought that would be a nice gig for a year or two. So, we boxed records, we palletized them—a lot of records—and went through a lot of offices. In many ways, we were the undertaker measuring the body for the casket. So we weren't always the most welcomed people because, as you can imagine, these officeholders were working on their resumes, trying to find their next job. So, anyway, we're a reminder that they had lost. They were all very, very kind. But we were a reminder. But they were all very, very kind.

Stephanie: Was it only National Archives staff that were boxing everything up or were there others?

Warren: I think we had some help from White House Office of Records Management, referred to as "WORM" at the time. White House Office of Records Management also helped us, but they didn't have enough staff to do it. So, there were 7, 8, 10, might have been 12, NARA employees at the time that were—because this had to be done from— let's say the election was

November 5th—I don't remember, but it had to be done between November 5th and, I think, the first group of records flew out to College Station somewhere around January 10th, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, something like that. So they all had to be ready to go. So it was all ”get and go.”

And, so, Pat Borders and I flew to College Station somewhere around between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and kind of looked at property that was available in College Station to put the records into. And we found this old bowling alley on University Drive that was about five miles from campus. And the nice thing about this bowling alley was there were no columns in the building, because it was a bowling alley and everything was open. It had been like a Kmart or something called FedMart. But, anyway, the building was open, and it had a loading dock. It had two loading bays. There had been a Chinese restaurant attached to it. And I'll tell you a great story in just a second.

So, they had somebody come to College Station to supervise the shelving, and they said, "How about you?" And I said, "Sure." So, like New Year's Eve, I left Washington, DC, and drove to College Station, Texas, and, I think, I was here the first—must have left before New Year's Eve because, like, January the 1st, I was in College Station about two blocks from the building. And on January 2nd, I walked into the building, and they had hired a contractor to shelve the building. We had a shelving plan. So, I was there and supervised the shelving, met all the security guards, took everybody on the tour and kind of stayed there and made the—. We put in a computer system, wiring, alarm system, oh my gosh, a vault for the national security classified stuff. So, you know, the people from the company were called "MARIS." I think they were installing the vault at the time. So, I was there while all this was going on. And then everything was shipped via tractor trailer from the Executive Office Building. There's that little road that's between the White House and the Executive Office Building that's closed off. Everything was loaded there and on the streets and sent to Andrews [Air Force Base] and put onto C-5A cargo planes, too, I think, and flown to—it used to be called Fort Hood. The name has just been changed. Sorry, I don't know what the name of it is. It just changed, like last week. And I was there. We got there. Oh, God. By then, I was in College Station preparing for at least two weeks alone. Dave Alsobrook, who was going to be the acting or interim or whatever director, then flew to College Station, and we drove the hour-and-a-half to two hours up to Killeen, Temple-Killeen. And I think we got there at 4 a.m., 3 a.m. I can't remember. It was early. They offloaded all the material onto 21 tractor trailers. And then at 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning, we left in a convoy for the hour-and-a-half or about an hour-and-a-half from Temple-Killeen to College Station. And as we drove through every small town in Texas, the sheriff was in the city square at the traffic light with his pistol, making sure that we made it through the traffic light successfully. And we brought with us two busloads of soldiers from Fort Hood, who had just come back from—some had gone to Desert Storm, some had just come back from Somalia.

And, so, in true National Archives fashion, we had a shelving plan. So every shelf—they were seven high—every shelf had a row number, a shelf number, and a position number. So you'd have like one - shelf one, one - bottom row, one - space number one. There were three spaces on a shelf. So, we had that shelving plan, the staff in DC. We took stickers and put them on the

boxes: what was in the box and where it went in the new building. And, so, we had two busloads of soldiers from Fort Hood who used a particular word that begins with an "F" and ends with "truck," and they used it as a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, modifier, exclamation. And they put them all together in seven-word sentences, and after a while, you kind of figure out what they were talking about by how they use the word. But, anyway, these are great guys. And we thought it would take them a day or two to shelve these 21 tractor trailer loads of boxes. Well, these guys, we had something we referred to them as streamliners. They were like flatbeds with steroids. These guys could put about 30 boxes on one. So these guys would load up all their streamliners, and the lieutenant or captain would—she would hit the stopwatch and these kids raced. These kids raced to see who could get the boxes on the shelves the quickest. And they were in great shape. And I think they started at six and, I think, by 11:00 a.m. or 12:00 p.m., they were done with 21 tractor trailers of records. Now, there were some artifacts there, too. And [we thought] there's no way these kids had done this correctly. So we spot checked the shelves to see, and we didn't find a single mistake. The kids had put all these records in their spots. So, what do you do with them? Well, first of all, they're all young kids. We bought them a bunch of pizza. And we weren't supposed to buy them beer, but we bought them a bunch of beer. They ate their pizza. They took their beer on the bus, and they went back to Fort Hood. And then we repeated all that again. So that was, maybe, the 15th. And then the second set of records were flown out, I think, on the 20th. And we redid the entire process either on the morning of the—either they were shipped—I think they were shipped out. So, maybe we did it all again on the morning of the 21st. We used the same process for the records that needed to be kept at the White House for the last week. And then we stored everything.

So one funny story: sometime after we were there, someone—and I want to say it was the *New York Times*, but I don't know if that's true anymore since my recollection is not as good as it used to be—wrote a story about how President Bush's Presidential and Vice Presidential papers were languishing away in an old bowling alley in a backwater town called College Station. So the director at the time wrote a rebuttal, which didn't get printed, I remember: "College Station wasn't a backwater town. It was the home of Texas A&M University, one of the nation's largest universities, and that the records were being taken care of by a team of archivists from a highly trained," you know, la la la "team of archivists from the National Archives. And they were being cataloged and made available for research." But the director, Dave Alsobrook, took the greatest exception to the fact that we were referred to as an old bowling alley, because we weren't just an old bowling alley, we were an old bowling alley and a Chinese restaurant. And it was just, just the funniest thing in the world. So, we were there from January '93, and we didn't move into the new facility until August of '97.

Stephanie: Were the boxes of records just being stored there, or was there work being done on them? Were they being—.

Warren: There was work. Some of the collection, as you might imagine, because it was coming out at the end of the administration, was not yet filed. So we had a lot of material that was unfiled. We had some people that just scraped their desks off into a box. So, we had some of that. And then the Bush office was set up in Houston. So, we went down there and picked up

some artifacts there. But they also had correspondence that they had not been able to complete, or they had written a letter to someone, and a person had written back. So, we did some of the same things we did for Reagan [Library]. We made copies of correspondence and sent them to Houston. And that office was still very, very active. So, they sent post-Presidential materials. But yes, we did a lot of cataloging and a lot of filing. And then a lot of people, a lot of kids who were in the Marine Corps, who had served on the HMX [Marine Helicopter Squadron One] helicopter or on Air Force One had not gotten their picture. They had gotten their picture with the President. They would show up, and we'd go find their picture for them and have it printed at a lab.

We also knew that we were going to be subject to the Presidential Records Act and FOIA. And so, at first, it was just three of us. There was Dave Alsobrook; Mary Finch, who had the audiovisual collection; and me. I had the textual collection. And then we hired a secretary and an administrative officer. About three or four months later, we started hiring archivists. We got very quickly into finding out exactly what we had cataloging the collection, looking at the paper inventories. This was the olden days when we were still using paper inventories. And we hired some very, very smart people. And they created some electronic databases for us. We had a guy, who's now the director at the Roosevelt Library, who created a database for us. And, I remember, he came to me one day, and he says, "This is Bill Harris, who's the director at Roosevelt." He says, "Warren, we got this WordPerfect suite." I said, "Huh? So that's nice." And he says, "It's got this database called Access." And I said, "Uh huh." He said, "Well, I've worked with Access Database." I said, "Okay." He says, "You know, this is an off-the-shelf database. I can build a database that will track all our reference, we can download all these sheets into the database, and it'll tell us where everything is." And I was a smart guy at the time. I said, "Okay, you just do that." And that's what he did. That database has been updated several times, and I think, 30 years later, I think they're still using the same database. Anyway, and Bill is now very smart, very, very smart. And he's now the director at Roosevelt [Library]. But I had—we had a great staff. We had some great people. Stephannie Oriabure, John Laster, Kate Dillon, Sam McClure there. Kate and Sam are now married. Gosh, we had some good employees. So, anyway, we got to work cataloging and getting all the materials ready for the five-year mark, when they would become available for research.

Stephanie: Okay. Looking back, what do you think about that whole process from the packing up of the records in the Executive Office Building, getting them shipped, and then putting them in this temporary storage? What do you think of that process? Was it pretty efficient?

Warren: Well, it was a lot of fun. Yeah, it was remarkably efficient. This is no dig at the National Archives, but we got that building shelved, demoed—the one in College Station, the one that had been the bowling alley. We got that thing from, like, the day or two after the election, we got that building shelved and demoed, with offices put in and equipment in, like, two months. Can you imagine that happening? No! No! But when you gotta do it, you gotta do it. We got everybody down there. We got all the records moved. I can't remember if it was the Air Force or the Army—I can't remember who was actually on the mission. And the soldiers from Fort Hood, most of them were in the Army. Those kids were just great. And we were, I remember, sitting

there on the runway, near the runway, and I wasn't on the plane because I got here before the planes ever left. But I can remember our—Dave Alsobrook and I were sitting there, and our planes with our two C-5A's with all of our material are flying in on, like, January the 15th, and they are loading kids up, and they're sending them to Somalia. Our planes land, and then these kids take off, and they're headed to Somalia at the end of the Bush administration. So, no, it was very efficient. And we didn't, remarkably, lose anything, which was a very, very remarkable thing. And this is all paper. We had very few—. There was an experimental system that Records Management was using for digitizing, but we had very, very little that was digitized. It was mostly all paper, and it all made it to College Station: both the four years of Bush Presidential, eight years of Bush Vice Presidential, and four years of [Dan] Quayle Vice Presidential records—because Quayle had made a decision that he would put his Vice Presidential records in the same Presidential Library as Bush.

Stephanie: Okay. I wasn't aware of that. Okay.

Warren: So we got a lot of his gifts, and then we got a lot of stuff from the Senate because the Vice President is president of the Senate. So he had an office at the Senate. So I remember going, before I left, picking up stuff at the Senate that they still had from when Bush was VP and president of the Senate. But, yeah, it was a remarkable process. Very, very well run. There was a guy who was in charge of security at the time. His name was Steve Hannestad. But the whole process was remarkably well done. Drove all that stuff out. I wasn't part of that process, but it was all driven out from the White House to Andrews, loaded on the planes—and the planes all had the wheels on the floor. And so you had these super pallets where, I think, you could actually put three. I don't remember how many pallets were on a pallet. And then you just wheeled them. They wheeled onto the plane. This is what they were made for. I'd flown to Fort Hood and was there when they arrived. And it was just a remarkably well run process. It was chaos. We were moving at lightning speed, but it was still remarkably well done.

Stephanie: So, at that point, you said that you thought this was going to be, maybe, a one-year or so assignment. What happened to moving back to DC?

Warren: So, as President Bush said, "We bought a little house." We bought a house here. This was 1993. The Savings and Loan Crisis had affected Texas pretty profoundly, which is one of the reasons we were able to find a vacant building in this town so easily. There was a lot of vacant property in this town. The housing market, at the time, was relatively affordable, so we bought a house. We got to know people in town, found a church, but we also found friends, got comfortable in the community. Everyone always said, "If you want to see the big city, you can go to Houston. It's only an hour-and-a-half away. Or if you want to go to the complete cultural opposite of College Station, you can go to Austin." We did go to Austin, but we never really went to Houston.

So, our first child was born three or four years after we were here. And then, we had a second child and then a third child. We kind of made friends, and it's a university town—so you get a lot of the cultural things.

And, as someone pointed out, the road from here to Houston, at the time that we moved here in '93, was two-lanes. It's called Highway 6. And the saying in town when someone had an attitude—about the attitudes in Houston–was that Highway 6 went both ways. [LAUGHS.] Anyways, the highway from here to Houston was two lanes and went through every small town in Texas, and every small town in Texas was pretty depressing. But the place started to recover from the Savings and Loan Crisis.

The point I was trying to make is we're just as close to the satellites as everybody else in the world. And because there was a university here, they had a very developed performing arts theater program, nice shopping center, grocery stores, football, basketball, baseball, cultural things to do, because it was a university town. So, there were a lot of things in this town to do that you didn't get in a small town in Texas, like College Station was at the time. And it was an agricultural, mechanical college. And my wife and I had both gotten our master's degree at an agricultural and mechanical college called Auburn University, which, like Texas A&M, was a land-grant university. So, there are great similarities in the student body and the culture here at Texas A&M, and it was a pretty conservative university at the time—still is. But if you want to see another part of Texas, you can go to Austin. And Austin is to Texas what Madison is to Wisconsin. My oldest lives in Georgetown, Texas, which is a suburb of Austin. So, we get over there a lot. And it's a pretty, pretty diverse state. Lot of stuff to do as far as nature and stuff like that. So I guess the long story short—and it's too late for that—is that we made friends, fell in love with the place, and enjoyed the work.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: And enjoyed—.

Stephanie: So then you stayed at the library during that entire time?

Warren: Yeah, and then in '97, the brand new building opened up. That was exciting. You know, new offices—.

Stephanie: Were you involved with that? Were you involved with the opening? Did you have a responsibility?

Warren: Yeah, I was by then, I think, I was a supervisory archivist. So me and the archival team shelved the new building and did the same darn thing. We put a label on every box and a label on every label, and I think we used a moving company the second time to move into the new building, but I was involved in the building of what went into the exhibit, the original exhibit. And, so, we moved into the building in August to get all our material in. As they say, we took the building out for its first voyage to see if everything—we did the shakedown cruise from August until, I think, it was November 7th. And then on November 7th, the world came to our—on the 6th or 7th—the world came to College Station, and we opened the building, and we were sitting right out there in the front, at the front of the building, and, like, in the front row when the

building opened, and everybody was here—major, you know—everybody was here. We had world leaders from all over the world. It was just great—governors, congressmen, senators, celebrities. Arnold Schwarzenegger was here. Cicely Tyson was here. Uh, what's her name? Crystal Gayle. And it was just an amazing couple of days. And then, people came from all over the world to see the exhibits. And then, not too long after that, we began–excuse me–providing records for research. That would have been '93, '94, '95, '96, '97. I guess somewhere in '98, '99, the records opened up for research, and I was a part of that process. [COUGHS.] Sorry. And then I was actually offered a couple of jobs back in DC, but, remarkably, every time I was offered a job back in DC for another agency, I ended up getting a promotion in College Station. So, I went from archivist to supervisory archivist, and then had an offer and went from being supervisory archivist to deputy director when the new director, who had been in the Air Force, knew nothing; he was a great, great guy, but he knew nothing about archives, and he needed somebody who knew about the Archives. I was appointed as his deputy, and I served him for about three years. So yeah, except for about two or three years, I spent all of my career in College Station.

Stephanie: So, how did your responsibilities change when you first moved to College Station to now become the deputy director? How did that change?

Warren: Yeah, when we first came, there were only three of us. So we just unloaded trucks. We did everything. I mean, if it needed to be done, we did it. So, the office furniture showed up. I had worked in a grocery store. One of the reasons I got my very first job working for NARA was, when I interviewed for the job, Doug Thurman asked me if I had any special skills, and I said I had worked in a grocery store, and I knew how to use both a manual pallet jack and an electric pallet jack, and he needed somebody who could use a pallet jack. So, we did everything. We unloaded trucks, you know, everything that needed to be done.

You know, it's funny, because over time I got to where I couldn't do anything computer-wise. But the computers were all DOS based, and the database we did have—like I said, we had some electronic records—but there was also a finding aid, and the finding aid was mostly electronic, and it was in a DOS system. So if something happened, I could go in and fix the system. My gosh, I couldn't do that today. We had this IBM mainframe that was as big as a room. In fact, it ran on tapes. And, every once in a while, the thing for some reason would shut down, and I would go to the big screen and keyboard, and get into the guts of it. And I can't do that anymore. You know, I can't. But back then, I could. And I can remember one time there was some kind of problem we had encountered, and I actually went through the code and found a mistake in the code. How? I couldn't do that today, but that's back when you know you could. It was DOS, so you could. You could ask the program to show you all the lines of code, and it would. I don't know if you can do that anymore. But that was a long time ago.

So, we did a little bit—we did everything, which was one of the reasons the job was so much fun. There were just three of us for the first three or four months. And if it needed to be done, you did it. If you needed to get in the van and drive to Houston to pick something up from

Bush's office, you got in the van and you drove the hour-and-a-half to Houston. You picked it up. If something needed to be built, you built it. We relied on each other.

And then, as I said, for a long time we didn't have a copy machine. Then, we finally somehow finagled a copy machine. I don't remember exactly how we did it, but we somehow rented one, and I'm not really sure how we did it. But then the National Archives actually gave us a real copy machine, and then we hired a secretary and an administrative officer. And then somewhere three or four or five months into our stay there, we started hiring archivists.

But, in the beginning, we did it all ourselves. And, so, if you needed to find a record, you'd start pulling. You'd go to where that office's records were and try to figure out where it was in the box, and you'd start pulling boxes off the shelf, and you'd sit on the floor and go through the records until you found the record you were looking for. We didn't have many finding aids. We had some folder title lists—some. But it was kind of an exciting time. You're doing what you were trying to do, and you felt like you were—we felt like, or at least I did, felt like we were doing good work. We were always very, very customer-friendly, which is one of the things I am most proud of at the Bush Library. We were always very, very customer-friendly. So when a researcher came to our research room and wanted to see records, within the first 15 minutes, they had the records.

Stephanie: Wow. That's great.

Warren: Yeah. Yeah. So, I'm not sure that happens everywhere.

Stephanie: Probably not. In terms of opening a new library—it sounds like you were very short staffed at the beginning, and then you started to hire more as time went on. But, is there anything that comes to mind that you would suggest for a future Presidential Library opening, for example?

Warren: Well, we hired a lot of young people. Well, you know, that is the question. Is there going to be another Presidential Library? Who knows.

Stephanie: Right.

Warren: What is the system going to look like in the future? I have my opinions on that, which I will not share. The hiring process was a lot different in 1993, '94, '95, '96, '97. There was a hiring process called "Outstanding Scholars." And we hired a lot of very smart, very smart, very smart people. Some were Texas A&M graduates: Sam McClure, Bob Holzweiss is the acting director. I think Sam McClure was 21 or 22 when we hired him; he was a kid. But hire smart people who can learn. Bill Harris was young. John Laster was young. I'm not saying you have to hire young people. I think you just need to hire really smart people. But, we were able to hire through this "Outstanding Scholars." A lot of kids who just came out of college or master's programs were very, very smart. We did have a smattering of a—Bill Harris was a Texas A&M graduate. I think he went to—.

Oh, here's a funny story. So, at Auburn University, I was a teaching assistant in the history department. So, it was very, very odd, because the University of South Alabama was a pretty small school. And it took great pride in the fact that its classes were very small. So, the whole time I'm at the University of South Alabama—three years I was there—I never had a history class that had more than about 30 people in it. So I go to Auburn University, and they offered me a teaching assistantship. So I go to *History of the World: Part One*, and there are 350 kids in a class. And I'm like, "What's going on here?" And, you know, the professor looks at me like I'm out of my mind. He said, "Where did you get your... Yeah, this is the way it works. You know, 400 kids in a *History of the World: Part One*." So, anyway, we hired Bill Harris, and he comes up to me and says, "You know, I got one 'B' in college." I said, "Really?" "And you gave it to me." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "History 101. I was one of your students." And I said, "There's no way. I don't remember you." "Well, you know, there were 350 of us." I said, "You're kidding me." He said, "I don't believe you." He says, "I still have the blue book." So he goes home. The next day, he brings in the blue book with his essay in it. He got a "B."

Stephanie: He had the proof.

Warren: Anyway, so we had a lot of very smart people. So, that was my philosophy as a leader: you hire people that are smarter than you are. Two things I was kind of proud of: I always tried to hire people that were smarter than me. And I always had this innate ability to figure out what they were good at, and let them do what they were good at. And if they had ideas, I always listened to their ideas. And if they were good ideas, I said, "Do it."

And then the other thing I was always kind of proud of is that we, our staff, the staff that we had in the beginning, a lot of those staff went on to bigger and better things. And I never begrudged anybody who worked for me when they came into my office and said, "Listen, it's been a pleasure working for you, but I'm going to go back to DC and work for the National Archives, because I can get a GS-14 or..."—you know, you just encourage that. And the guy that hired me, Doug Thurman, that's the way he was with his staff. He encouraged his staff, even though it was often detrimental to him. He encouraged the staff to look for better opportunities. So that was one of the things I was always proud of, that we hired smart people, and when they were ready to move on to something better, you never begrudge them.

But I had a talent for hiring very smart people, and I had a talent for figuring out what they were good at. But the guy that built the database, somehow I knew that if I let him build a database—and I had another guy—I'm a little spatially defective, but John Laster, who went on to work for the National Archives, he could look at a room, and he could figure out—I don't know how he did it—but he could figure out how many shelves would fit and how you should put them in there. And I said, "Okay. Do it." And he scaled the new building. He had everything in the right place. But, yeah, I was very lucky. I still do, or did have when I retired, a lot of smart people working for me. A lot of really, really smart people.

Stephanie: Then how did you come to be selected for the director position?

Warren: Okay, so when Dave Alsobrook left to go to the Clinton Library, I became acting—was it acting director? It must have been. I ran the place for about six or eight months, because you know the hiring process at NARA. Are you aware of the hiring process at NARA? Most people find jobs before we can actually hire them. Gosh, we need more people like Kathy Elmstead. But, anyway, that's not here nor there.

So, they hired this guy named Doug Menarchik, who had been on Vice President Bush's NSC [National Security Council] staff. So, the President has a national security staff—the Vice President—and Doug Menarchik was one of the people that was on Vice President Bush's NSC staff. And he was at—was he at the Naval War College? When he retired from the Air Force, he might have been at Andrews. I can't remember. Anyway, he applied for the job and got the job as director of the Bush Library. I liked him. I liked him a lot. But he was a colonel, and he was a very typical colonel. So he got to the building at a certain time, which wasn't 8 a.m., and he went and played basketball at the recreation center at a certain time—it wasn't noon. And then he came back in the afternoon at a certain time that might not have been 1:00 p.m., and left, maybe, not at 4:00 p.m. But that being said, he did great things for our relationship with Texas A&M, with the former President's office, and with the community. He just worked. Even if he didn't work normal day hours, he worked a lot of evening hours doing speeches and stuff.

So, as I said, he needed somebody to be his deputy who understood how the system worked, because he didn't understand. He didn't understand how the system worked. And he didn't know the staff. And he needed somebody who knew the staff. So we never had a deputy before, but the staff was growing. And, like I said, he was not a National Archives employee. So they posted a job for deputy director. And, I guess, you know, it takes a while. So, I guess, by the time it actually got announced, doing the selection, he knew I was capable and knew I'd been there awhile, and he knew I knew the staff and learned that I knew how things worked and that I wouldn't get him in trouble, that I would take care of his back. And he selected me as his deputy. And God, he was so good. Both Doug Thurman and he were both good to me.

So, we did a lot of programming, because one of the things that we had not done was any public programming. And he loved public programs. So, we did a lot of public programming. So, in the beginning, he would do the introductions for the speakers, and after a while, he made me do it. And I said, "No, I don't want to get out in front of an audience and introduce and say what's coming up, say hello to everybody." And he said, "This is one of those things you've got to learn how to do." And he says, "You're going to mess it up the first time you do it. Maybe the second time you do it, you're not going to be very good at it." But he says, "About the 50th time you do it, you might still be nervous, but you start getting good at it." So he made me do stuff I was uncomfortable doing like public speaking. And he made me join the Rotary Club, which I did not want to do, but it turned out that it was the right decision to do. And he got me involved in the community. I think I was on the board of the Chamber of Commerce for a while. I got to know city leaders. He made me do stuff that I was uncomfortable doing. So, he was a great mentor, and I got more and more comfortable doing it. And I did more and more of it and got more and more involved in the community with the leaders. I got to know people at Texas A&M.

After 9/11, Mary Finch, who was the audiovisual archivist, was getting ready to get on a plane to go to DC for an audiovisual conference on 9/11. And we had dropped by the office before I took her to the airport to pick up something. And Doug was sitting there watching the television, and the first plane had flown into the building. And, at that time, everyone was saying there had been a plane many, many, many years ago that had flown into the Empire State Building, and it had been an accident. And Doug said, "This is no accident." And, shortly after that, the second plane flew into the building and then the Pentagon thing. So, he wanted to go back to work for the Administration in that role. So, I think, he ended up getting a job with USAID [United States Agency for International Development]. And I think he went to some of the garden spots of the world: Afghanistan, Pakistan. If it was a "-stan," I think he was there.

So, President Bush had a chief of staff. Jean Becker was President Bush's Chief of Staff. And he recommended—I kind of knew Jean, because Doug had made me work with her—and Doug recommended that I should get the job as director, that I knew how the building worked, I knew half the staff, and I was a good guy. And so, Jean Becker called me one day, and she said, "President Bush is looking for somebody to run the Presidential Library. What do you think?" And I said, "Well, I've been deputy director for Doug. I was a supervisory archivist for Dave Alsobrook. You know, whoever you pick, I'll work with." And she said, "Well, the President is thinking about choosing you." Silence. And I said, "Oh." She said, "President Bush believes in promoting the civil service. So, you work for the National Archives. You know the job. He's thinking about picking you." I said, "Wow. Yes, I'd love it." And so she said, "But don't tell anybody, because we're going to have to convince some other people it's their idea. But you have the job as President Bush's chosen." I said, "Okay." So, remarkably, Doug Menarchik's last day was the 25th of December, 2004. And my first day was December 26th of 2004.

Stephanie: Mm. So the President is the one that selects who is the director?

Warren: Well, the National Archives selects.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: But when the President is still alive and it's his Presidential Library, he is sometimes consulted.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: So, it was a little unique in that I was, at the time, one of the few National Archives employees that was promoted to director. At a lot of the Presidential Libraries, maybe most, the directors had not been NARA employees, like Doug Menarchik had come out of the Air Force. I don't remember if Duke Blackwood, who was at Reagan [Library] at the time or not, but he wasn't a NARA employee. The person at Kennedy [Library] wasn't. At Roosevelt [Library]—. Anyway, I was unique in that I was a National Archives employee. Anyway, the Archivist of the United States called me up—because the ultimate decision was the Archivist of the United

States. The former Governor—he was an archivist for 10 years—called me up and offered me the job, because ultimately the decision was his. And so, God, I didn't think I'd be able to do the job, quite honestly. But, I had a great assistant. Great AO [administrative officer]. A great staff. A great supervisory archivist. Patricia Burchfield, who had been a registrar at Johnson, was my curator. And she was fantastic. And a couple of years later, she filled my position as deputy and was very, very lucky. We worked very, very well for most of my career. And then when she left, I said, "What?" She retired, and I said, "Why are you retiring? You're only 60 years old." She said, "Warren, I'm in the Civil Service Retirement System." And I said, "Uh huh." She says, "I started working when I was 18." I said, "Uh huh." She said, "Warren, it doesn't matter whether I work 41 years or 42 years or 43 years. After I've worked 40 years, my retirement is the same. And I have things I want to do." So she left. And then I appointed Bob Holzweiss as the acting director, and he was my deputy for five or six or seven years. I don't know. He did a tremendous job.

You know, it's all about the staff. You know it? I had a great program person. Tracy Payne and Karen Gonzalez and Robin Jones. And a great archival and museum staff. It's all about the staff, and they were all very, very customer-focused, which I'm not sure is true everywhere, with every business.

And we had this remarkable, remarkable, remarkable relationship with our foundation and with the former President's office. So I worked with one, two, three, four— let's see—Roman, Jones, Doug—four foundation directors. I was able to create very good relationships with all four. They were very supportive in programming and also in money. And they all believed very strongly—I had a great education director, Shirley Hammond, who just retired right after me—we had a great education program, because we believed that Mrs. Bush was all about literacy. So we believed that we should have a very strong education program. And the foundation was very, very, very supportive of the education program. And Mrs. Bush was very, very supportive of our education program. She did an education program for us every year, even when she probably was too old to be doing it. But we did a literacy program with Mrs. Bush. And one of the things, probably, we're most proud of is we did an education program each year with Mrs. Bush called "Reading Discovery," and we'd have 600 local students in the audience, and we would have anywhere from 50,000 to 75,000 to 100,000 kids watching online. No kidding. And this was using a rudimentary system like this [POINTING TO VIDEO CONFERENCING TECHNOLOGY], but it was in its infancy. And we used something in Texas called "Connect to Texas," which was an educational system that Texas A&M owned. And it was all voice activated. So Mrs. Bush would read to the students, and then six students would read to each other, and then Mrs. Bush would take 20 or so questions from the audience. And one year we had a young lady in Ghana, in West Africa, who somehow had an internet connection in a box. And she was in a school with outdoor—you know, with a roof, but the floor—. And she was wearing a uniform, and they had just met their First Lady. I don't know how, but they had a new First Lady, and they just met their First Lady. And this kid and young lady in Ghana, in West Africa, asked Mrs. Bush a question, and all—that year there were 100,000 kids online and all 100,000 kids in every classroom across America and wherever else kids were watching—saw that girl in Ghana, in West Africa. And we were so nervous because of the time difference, the distance. Was it going to work? And it

worked magically. So we had great education programs. We were very lucky. I didn't know if I'd be any good at the job. And, you know, it turns out if you have a good staff, it's easy.

Stephanie: Did you work a lot with or collaborate with other Presidential Libraries and their staff since you were new?

Warren: Yeah, we did some. Johnson Library is two hours away from us in Austin, Texas, and I had a PR [public relations] person whose dad had worked for NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], and he wanted to do a NASA exhibit. And, so, we did an exhibit with Johnson Library, because Johnson had been instrumental in the space program after Kennedy died. And, so, we did a cooperative exhibit, *From the Earth to the Moon*, where Johnson did *From the Earth to the Moon,* and we did *From the Moon and Beyond.* And so they did from the beginning of the space program to Neil Armstrong walking on the Moon, and we did from that to—I can't remember what the project was—Horizon or whatever. And we did a program where we had every living astronaut, all the living Apollo astronauts, come to the Bush Library. So Ken Mattingly. Armstrong was dead by then. Buzz Aldrin came. That was pretty magical. But we worked with the Johnson Library very closely on that. And then when President Bush 43 was elected, we did an exhibit called *Two Presidents* or something. I can't remember what the exhibit was called. Anyway, we did an exhibit on George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush, and we did an exhibit on John Adams and John Quincy Adams. So, they were just putting the collection together at the Bush 43 Library, but we were able to get the bullhorn and some artifacts from 43. And then there was this great guy who worked for the Massachusetts Historical Association. And this is before 9/11. We worked with a museum in Salem called the Peabody Essex Museum. And we got a bunch of stuff from the Massachusetts Historical Association, including the original copy of the letter that Abigail Adams had written her husband telling him that when he was authoring, you know, helping write the Declaration of Independence or whatever, the Constitution, that they shouldn't forget the ladies. Which, of course, they did. They sent us the original! God, why did they do that? But they did. We had John Quincy Adams—. Oh, so we worked with 41 on that and ours. But we also worked really closely with the Massachusetts Historical Association. But one of the nice things about the directors, we got together usually a couple times a year, usually one time was in Washington, DC, and the second time was in one of the Presidential Libraries. So we all got to know each other. I got to know the directors at Johnson, and the directors at 43, and the director at Clinton pretty well—because they were within traveling distance. And we worked cooperatively on a lot of things. So yeah. Over the years, we did.

Stephanie: You said that you had a really good relationship with the Foundation. What was it like working with other stakeholders like the university, the National Archives, any of your researchers—working with them all together so that they're all great? It's probably hard to do. So, how did you handle that?

Warren: In the very, very beginning, we always had a good relationship with the former President's office. I'm not sure. In the beginning, the university didn't know what to make of us. But, they got it pretty quickly. I'm not sure they understood exactly what we were, that we were

the National Archives, and we weren't exactly part of the university. We were on the university campus, but we weren't exactly the university. But they got it pretty quickly. And this is a university whose reputation is growing, and they see the Presidential Library as part of the—even if it's just a four-year President, the reputation of George Bush has grown since he left office, especially in the current political climate—. But the university has grown to understand that we are a great addition on campus, and that people come from all over the world, even if they're not coming to the university from all over the world to see the Bush Library—and they come for our programming. And President Bush brought speakers in, like Brian Mulroney, Helmut Kohl, Prime Minister [John] Major. My gosh, we had everybody and anybody here. And that was a big boost to the reputation of the university. And as the university has grown from about 35,000 students to the mega-university it is now, we still are a very pivotal part of the university's reputation.

So, we work closely with the universities; still do—and both cities, so Bryan and College Station. We had an exhibit on the American railroad 12 years ago. Bob Holzweiss, who's my deputy, has a Ph.D. in railroads. He wrote his dissertation on the Penn Central Railroad. So he said, "We need to do an exhibit on the history of the American railroad and its place in American culture." You have time zones because of the railroad, so—a lot of stuff because of the railroads. The West was developed because of the railroads. So he said, "Union Pacific, their trains come through this town about 30 times a day, so we should go to Omaha, Nebraska, and we should ask Union Pacific to sponsor the exhibit. We should ask them for a caboose." So the Foundation director said, "Wow, that's a great idea. Railroads, everybody loves trains. Let's go to Omaha, and let's talk to Dick Davidson, who's the CEO of Union Pacific."

So we went to Omaha and sat down with Dick Davidson, CEO of Union Pacific, and we said, "We would like you to sponsor this exhibit." "Yes, we'll do it." "We'd like a caboose." He said, "We, at Union Pacific, never thought cabooses would be historic. So when we stopped putting cabooses on the end of trains, we got rid of all the cabooses." There's a little device on trains called a TED, Train End Device, and it does what a caboose used to do. And he says, "I don't know if we can give you a caboose," but he says, "How about this?" He said, "We have these brand new General Electric diesel electric locomotives, and they're very fuel efficient. We're very proud of them. They have dynamic braking," blah, blah, blah—when the train brakes, the electricity—anyway, it goes on the back of the train. All right. And he said,"How about we take one of those brand new ones out of the factory and instead of painting it Union Pacific yellow, we'll paint it in the colors of Air Force One and we'll put "4141" on it. And we'll send that locomotive down to College Station, and we'll build a sidetrack and park it there for your exhibit." And we said [JOKING], "No, that's a terrible idea." No, we said, "That's a great idea." So they did. And they found us a caboose, actually, and then when the exhibit was over, they ran that train all over the country. And I was going somewhere. Where was I going?

Anyway, when that exhibit ended, they traveled that locomotive all over the US, and then they retired it, too. After about a year or two, they retired it to Little Rock, and then that locomotive pulled the President's body to College Station when he died. And so that locomotive is going out in front of the building. There was a story I had, and I don't know where I was going.

But we have worked closely with stakeholders, like Union Pacific, and we've had just great luck with people like that. And there's a building going up, being built out in front of the building right now, and the locomotive is there. And in October, the very last helicopter with the interior that President Bush flew on as President will be going in that building. So the Foundation is still very, very supportive and—oh, sorry—so the city of College Station decided—this is where I was going—the city of College Station decided that they were going to redo the logo for the city. So they came to us and Jason Sokol, who was the PR guy who I knew, said, "We want to put the 4141 locomotive on our city seal. And it'll have 'UP' [Union Pacific] on the front, and it'll have '4141.' Can you contact UP and see if they'll agree?" UP was more than happy to do it.

But College Station is called College Station because it's where the college station was. So the kids who got off the train to go to college, got off at the college station. And, so, the point I'm trying to make—a long story short, too late—is that we've had great input or great buy-in from the city. And College Station is not the small town it was when I moved here 30 years ago. It's now a very culturally diverse, very technically diverse, growing, prospering city. And they have taken—both the city of College Station and the city of Bryan, and the County Brazos, and the seven-county region around us—are part of our stakeholders, part of our supporters. So it's not only the foundation, the former President's office, the university, but the city of College Station, Bryan, and the county. And the foundation gets a lot of hotel/motel tax, too, from the cities to publicize the library.

Stephanie: I was wondering where the funding comes from. Do you get funding from the university also, or where does all the funding come from?

Warren: So, all of our education, exhibit programs, special event programs, and speakers, all that comes through the foundation. They give us close to $1 million a year and then some in-kind. And then a lot of public relations—so in Texas, HOT [Hotel Occupancy Tax] tax, hotel/motel tax, revenue has to be spent 70 miles outside of where it's generated. HOT taxes are supposed to be used to drive tourism. And so the foundation gets a lot of money from this. And, as you can imagine, College Station generates a lot of HOT tax. But they get a lot of money from the hotel/motel tax in order to do advertisements on the internet—70 miles outside of Bryan/College Station. The city generates a lot of—there's always something: football, basketball, baseball, six-on-six football, softball. The city of College Station has found a niche. They're not quite big enough for big softball tournaments, but they're just big enough for medium softball tournaments. So there's softball fields all over this town. And during the summers, there's six-man football. Every hotel in this town is full. So the money that's generated comes back, or some of it comes back, to the foundation to generate more tourism. So, yeah, the foundation's been very generous.

We do not get university funds, but we get—well, we don't get university funds directly, but all of our landscaping is taken care of by the university, because they still own the grounds. So we don't have to pay a mower to cut the grounds. The university does it. And the grounds are kept up, and we have 100 acres here. Grounds are kept in pretty good shape, very nice shape. So

although we may not get money directly from the university, we get a lot of in-kind: the power plant that generates the electricity and the chilled water plant that we get our chilled water—of course, we do pay for it, but we don't have to pay for the actual plant, because the university has it. So we get a lot of in-kind from the university. Yeah, they're good partners. Very good partners.

Stephanie: I know that you work with the foundation, and it sounds like you were working with the Presidential family. Are there issues with trying to keep the museum exhibits nonpartisan and all of that so that you're showing all sides?

Warren: Yeah, yeah. So, we've been lucky. We never had a problem. We had an exhibit one time that had artifacts for each President. And we had an artifact from one President, and let's just say he may not have been a friend of President Bush's. I did get a complaint from one person. And I talked to someone who had been pretty high in the Bush administration, and I said, “You know, we're nonpartisan, nonpolitical, so we’ve got artifacts from Presidents that President Bush liked, who were Republicans. We’ve got artifacts from Presidents who were Democrats, who President Bush may not have liked.” And that person said, "You're exactly right. That's the way you do it." So I've only had, like, one complaint from maybe one person about one large artifact. Because I'd been here so long and I knew everybody, I was able to call someone up and say, "Someone's complained." And, you know, we're the National Archives. We had to stay nonpartisan and nonpolitical. If we're going to do the Presidents, and we're going to do all of them, we have to do them all. So we never really, really had a problem. In the beginning, before I became the director, some people in the Administration wondered why we were doing exhibits that weren't always about President Bush. But I think we were able to explain that. And, as time has gone on, I think people in the Administration understand that we do have to do or can do or should do. And we just closed an exhibit here at the end of my career on Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid in South Africa, which had a lot of President Bush in it. And it was a great exhibit to end a career on.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: And we had Nelson Mandela's grandson here for the opening, but it covered Nelson Mandela's entire life: his 21 years or so in prison and his time as president—excuse me—of South Africa. So, no, except for maybe one, there were not too many complaints. There seems to be an understanding about—and the former members of the Administration—that we're the National Archives. And the staff, you know, I don't ask my staff what political party they belong to.

Yeah. We try to do things. And, you know, when a researcher comes, we don't care if the researcher is a Democrat or Republican or Independent. It's the way it should be. We try not to do exhibits based on politics. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We haven't had a problem. Never.

Stephanie: Okay. I don't remember when it was, but I remember reading something about the National Archives fairly recently, I think, talking about moving the management of Presidential,

maybe future Presidential Libraries, to a private foundation or something like that. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Warren: I have an opinion.

Stephanie: I don't know if I have it right or not. But, do you know anything about that?

Warren: So, the museum at [President George W. Bush] 43 is going to be run by the foundation, not by the National Archives anymore. I think the model just changed. I think the model for the [President] Trump, I'm sorry, the Obama Presidential Library is that the museum will be owned by the Obama Foundation and not by the National Archives. I've always been a proponent for the National Archives controlling the content—and the museum. But I'm not sure that's the future. But, if anybody's ever asked me, I think we do a better job at it. A lot of us are historians. A lot of us are museum professionals. We're nonpartisan, nonpolitical. I think we should be running museums. I do understand that they're very expensive to run. And there's a great bit of cost benefit to line the foundations to assume those costs. But I do wonder what happens in the future when the Bush 43 Library, the George W. Bush Library, is 25-30 years old, and they're not generating the income to run the museum or to staff it. What happens? But that's not my decision. That's people that get paid a lot more money at the National Archives than I do to make those decisions. But, for the time being, the Bush Library is run by us—which is the model that President Roosevelt established.

Stephanie: So you think it's starting from 43, from Bush 43, on—or it's Bush 43 and then Obama on, or something?

Warren: Well, I do know that Obama made a decision. The majority of their records are digital, so you don't need a big building in order to store all the boxes of paper, because they're digital records. The same with the Trump administration—the vast majority of those records are digital. The same is true, somewhat, with Bush 43. So Obama will have a museum, but that museum will be owned by the Obama Foundation. We will own some of the content, and I'm sure we'll lend it to them. I'm not sure how that will work, but it'll be their museum. And so Bush 43, retroactively, has gone back and decided that they will operate the museum—and not the National Archives. And the education program, I believe, too, also—and that the archival program will remain with the National Archives.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: Whether it's a good idea or a bad idea, we'll wait and see. Like I said, I have my opinion, and I think the way we do it at [President H. W.] Bush 41 is the way it should be done. But times change and records change. You know, there's no boxes of records anymore. And there's not folders full of contact sheets and—. You know, Kodak color negatives don't exist anymore, except by people who are "fancy pantsy" artists who still like shooting on film. Everything is now digital, and it takes up a lot less room. So I don't know. We'll see. There's a brand new Archivist [of the United States]. We'll see what she wants to do.

Stephanie: We will see. One last thing: I did hear that they were going to be transferring the classified records from [Presidential] Libraries. I'm not sure if it's from all NARA locations across the country or specific to libraries—that they're consolidating. Do you have any thoughts on that, if that's a good idea—or is it efficient? Is it good for researchers or—?

Warren: Okay, I'll tell you. I'll kind of answer the question without trying to get too wonky or political. So, we have a staff at Bush 43 who has worked with these classified records for 30 years. Yeah, 30 years. They know the classified records forwards and backwards and upside down. They are experts at what's in the classified records and what information is in those classified records. I will say that we have done a marvelous job over the last 35 years of proactively getting the records declassified. So, I'm no longer director, but whoever is director, the bulk of material that will be shipped back to the National Archives is a lot smaller than it would have been if we had not been proactive in getting our material declassified. So, General Scowcroft was head of the National Security Council. The bulk of the classified records in the vault are NSC records, and Scowcroft—the Bush School next door, a great partner—we talked about partnership— the Bush School next door has a program called the Scowcroft Institute. And very early in the life of the Scowcroft Institute, we encouraged students and professors and the Scowcroft Institute—you know, they said, "Well, we would like to see General Scowcroft's records." And I said, "Well, there's only one way you're going to see General Scowcroft records, and that's if you file a mandatory review request for declassification," I said, "because they're not subject to automatic declassification, because they're not old enough." So they started sending their students and their professors over, and they started going through the records and invoking mandatory review. So we were able to get a large bulk of our classified records declassified. So, you know, what was 30 shelves, 40—I don't know—a lot of shelves of records—. There's maybe a quarter [of records] in that vault now of what there was 30 years ago. But I do think, whether this decision to move them is good or bad, that all these records are going back, and they're going to be commingled, and the people that can find what's in those records and respond to the requests from those records—and when stuff is declassified, ship it back so that it can be put into the open space—are the people that have been working with the records for 30 years. So that's my two-cents.

Stephanie: Okay. Yeah, when you've got that subject matter expert right there who knows the records in and out, it's kind of hard to move them somewhere else when they don't have that.

Warren: I think the rationale is that that's two—we have two archivists working on our classified records. The rationale is this: you know, you move the records out. That's two archivists who can go back in and work on all the other records. And so that's an efficiency in savings. And in a time when the NARA budgets are not increasing for inflation or cost of salaries, I do see the rationale for it. But, I also think that the expertise is at the Presidential Libraries, not at the National Archives. [It's] not that the National Archives doesn't do things very, very well. They do. But the people who've had–.

Stephanie: There's pros and cons.

Warren: The people that have had their hands on those records for 30 years, or 15 years, or 10 years, are the people that should have those records. It's not to say that the people who are getting those records aren't smart. It's just going to take them some time to figure out what's—. You know what I'm saying.

Stephanie: Yes. Yeah. I think they have some rationale behind it, but there's pros and cons to it, right?

Warren: Yeah, and it would be fair to say that anybody in the National Archives would tell you that I have argued to keep the records, but I haven't been obstinate about it.

Stephanie: Yeah.

Warren: So, I do understand the pros and cons, but I do think it's better they stay at the Presidential Libraries, but I do understand both sides of the coin. So no one's become an enemy of mine because they've made a decision that I don't agree with, which is something that happens too often in this country right now.

Stephanie: You're very right about that. Yes. Yeah. Well, hey, I've kept you for a full two hours.

Warren: Well, I appreciate it.

Stephanie: This has been really interesting. You have such a storied career, and you've met so many interesting people and worked at several different [Presidential] Libraries and—.

Warren: Yeah. Yeah. It's been fun. I enjoyed the career. Thirty years was time to retire. I've wanted to retire when I was still kind of enjoying the work. But, 62 1/2 was the time to retire. Um, you didn't ask me who my favorite person I ever met was.

Stephanie: And who was that?

Warren: Bob Newhart.

Stephanie: Bob Newhart. Okay.

Warren: Mrs. Bush used to have a literacy fundraiser down in Houston, and she would bring the authors up. And Bob Newhart came many years ago. You just meet all kinds of people. But growing up watching *The Bob Newhart Show*, it was just—he was just such a nice, nice, nice guy.

Stephanie: In person, in real life, he's a nice guy. Yeah.

Warren: They mostly all are.

Stephanie: Okay.

Warren: So anyway. Yeah. Thank you. It's been a great career, and I've enjoyed every minute of it and enjoyed working with—.

Stephanie: What do you miss the most?

Warren: Well, I missed the staff the most. You know, you develop those friendships. I told everybody that I—we have volunteers at work—and I told all my National Archives director colleagues that I was going to volunteer at the library as a docent, greeting visitors one day a week. They all thought I was out of my mind. But Tuesdays from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., I'm a docent at the library. So the National Archives has allowed me to kind of be NARA's representative, even though I'm retired, for the building that's going up, that's got the helicopter and the train in it. So, the new head of Presidential Libraries was very nice to let me do that.

And then, you know, I'm the president of the local arts council, and we gave two 5,000-dollar scholarships and two 3,000-dollar scholarships to kids who are artists going on to art schools from high school. And then the foundation, they give a scholarship to almost every high school in town, and they needed somebody to go and present scholarships. And I just get a big kick out of going to a high school and giving a kid a 5,000-dollar scholarship, who's going to go off and be an artist. And it's a lot of fun. I was in a little small town, Franklin, which has a population—I think there's 70 kids in a high school graduating class—and I was there for the arts council. I gave a girl a 3,000-dollar art scholarship. But there was a girl there who got a 100,000-dollar Texas A&M scholarship, something called the Terry Scholarship. Houston Livestock and Rodeo raises a lot of money for scholarships. And she got a 100,000+dollar scholarship to attend Texas A&M. So I enjoy doing that kind of stuff.

Stephanie: Wow. Yeah.

Warren: And I still see my colleagues at work, and I still see the foundation people, and the arts council keeps me very, very busy. And I was involved in the community for 30 years, and so I have friends here. So, I thought I would be lonely and wouldn't have anything to do. But people like you give me—. So like today, I went over to the foundation this morning and worked a little bit with the staff on the project. I'm doing this interview. I'm meeting with the—we're giving another scholarship to a Bryan [Texas] kid, so I'm meeting with the mayor of Bryan at 5 o'clock, and at 7 o'clock, I've got a dinner at a fancy-schmancy restaurant with some people in town. So, it's a good life. It was a good time to retire.

Stephanie: Yeah. Yes. It sounds like you are super busy still.

Warren: So, anyway, I've been very, very fortunate. Very, very fortunate. And I'm having a hell of a good time in retirement.

Stephanie: That is good to hear. Would you happen to have any photographs that you would want to share with us? Just one during your time in service, or it could be a picture from now or anything like that?

Warren: Yeah, I have a whole, uh,—. Can I send them tomorrow?

Stephanie: Oh, yes, yes. Whenever you have time. There's no rush.

Warren: I have a whole carousel. The foundation did a program for my retirement. They're very nice, and they put a bunch of photos together throughout my career. So it might be more than you want, but I'll send it to you.

Stephanie: Okay. Yeah, that would be great. We'd appreciate it. So, yeah, just thank you so much for spending all this time with me today.

Warren: Hopefully, I didn't bore you to death.

Stephanie: Oh, no! This is so interesting. You know, you've just done so much. It's been really, really great.

Warren: Well, thanks a lot. I appreciate it.

Stephanie: Yeah. All right. Well, hey, I'm going to let you go. But again, thank you so much. And, you know, hopefully we'll be talking soon about the photographs.

Warren: All right. Enjoy your long weekend.

Stephanie: Okay. You, too. All right. Bye, Warren.

[END RECORDING]