

EXIT INTERVIEW WITH
ANN ANDERSON
-by-
David E. Alsobrook
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Interview with Ann Anderson, Deputy Press Secretary, First Lady's Staff, September 8, 1978, in Room 492 of the Old Executive Office Building. Interviewer is David Alsobrook of the Presidential Papers Staff.

ALSOBROOK: Ann, could you tell me a little bit about your job with the Nashville Tennessean back in the early sixties?

ANDERSON: Yes, David. That was my first real job after college. I started there in effect as a copy girl, and I worked my way up in what is the equivalent, at the Tennessean, of the Washington Post Style Section, into a job as a feature writer, and I also covered fashions at the Tennessean. I was there for a total, I think, of about three years.

ALSOBROOK: This was when you met Patrick, too?

ANDERSON: That was when I met Patrick.

ALSOBROOK: Could you tell me, also, a little bit about your position with the Peace Corps office here in Washington?

ANDERSON: Yes, I was with the Public Information Division of the Peace Corps. I started out as a writer and editor. We had quite a number of publications that we developed and published from the Public Information Office, primarily as an aid to recruiting, but also we had things like the Annual Report and some other books. We compiled, for example, a book of things written; we had sort of a backlog of people who had been overseas and served as volunteers, and some of them had written very thoughtfully about their experiences overseas. We were able to compile enough of these to make a little book which we called the Peace Corps Reader, and I was the editor of that book. We had a number of documents like that that were put out. In addition to which, I was dealing with the press in helping them to develop stories about the Peace Corps and about Peace Corps volunteers, and part of this was a chance to travel overseas and interview volunteers, which we would do. We'd take a camera and we would go out and visit as many volunteers in the field as we could and take pictures and then we would come back and we'd feed this material back to their hometown papers, because, as you can imagine, there was really no other way to get that information from overseas and get it back and get a good picture. Most hometown papers just didn't have the facilities to do that themselves, and so we provided that service to them. I spent a year as a program evaluator with the Peace Corps, which also meant a great deal of overseas travel; interviewing volunteers for a different purpose. It was information that served as a basis for determining whether programs were successful or not successful, whether

to continue them or not, and so that was the purpose of my evaluation experience. Then I eventually want back into the public affairs part of the Peace Corps, and that's where I was at the time when I left Peace Corps and at that point I was the senior person in the Public Information Office.

ALSOBROOK:Were you working for Mary Hoyt at this particular time?

ANDERSON:Well, Mary was at the Peace Corps around 1965 and '66, and Mary had her own independent function there, really, so I was not actually working for her but we were in the same division. She was the radio and television person in the Public Information Division. Whereas, I was working in the Writing Press Division. This was where I first met her.

ALSOBROOK:You worked with Senator Muskie's Presidential Campaign in 1972; can you recall some particularly memorable experiences during the campaign?

ANDERSON:Unfortunately, I can't because I had such a minor role, and it was right in the Washington office here. But again that was another point at which Mary Hoyt and I continued our professional relationship, because during the primary part of the campaign Mary was responsible for Mrs. Muskie's press, and I think Mrs. Muskie had a staff of about two people, one of whom was Mary and one of whom was Jane Fenderson, who is also working for the First Lady now, and some volunteers. And I was one of the volunteers. My role was really to try to keep track of all the current issues that were going on, everything that the candidates were saying about the issues and in general what the issues of the day were, things that Mrs. Muskie should be aware of, that she perhaps should be talking about, things that she could relate to in her husband's ideas and to his campaign platform. And so that was my assignment. We had what we called "The Book." Unfortunately, it was an abortive attempt book in the end, because Muskie did drop out of the primaries, but "The Book" was to be sort of a compilation of all these issues that Mary could grab as she was running to catch the plane with Mrs. Muskie to go on a campaign trip. She could grab it, sit on the plane beside Mrs. Muskie, go through "The Book" and say well here's what's being said today.

ALSOBROOK:Ann, along this same line, could you also tell me a little bit about your role during the 1976 Presidential Campaign?

ANDERSON:Well, as you know my husband was the Campaign Speech Writer. Starting in about May of 1976, he traveled all summer with Governor Carter and then during the week of the convention, I went up to New York with him, and again Mary Hoyt and I came into contact with each other because Mary had just taken the assignment of being Mrs. Carter's Press Secretary. They had arrived in New York and found that everyone was suddenly clamoring to meet this lovely new political figure whose political wife had just burst upon the scene, and everyone had just realized how lovely and intelligent she really was and how important she really was. So Mary was being swamped with requests from people. She called the first day I arrived there and she said "come up and help me." So I went up to Mrs. Carter's suite of offices and I almost didn't get out the whole week. We were so busy with the phones and the press, setting up

interviews; we set up a number of interviews for her during the week and a number of different things that she did. And then when the convention week was over, I was asked to join her staff, and at that point we did not know exactly where we were going to set things up. And I think Mary was still thinking we were going to be doing part of the work out of Washington, and she sort of wanted me to hold down the fort there in Washington, but of course as it worked out, they set up the whole thing in Atlanta, except for Peter Bourne's shop up here. So eventually it did not work out that I went to work for Mrs. Carter, but I did go to Atlanta in the beginning of September, and I worked in the Speech Writing Office where the job of three or four of us who were in the Speech Writing Office there who stayed in Atlanta, was to provide the basic drafts and the research for the campaign speeches. Someone would prepare a draft; we would be given an assignment of a topic that we were to work on, and you would prepare your draft or speech for a certain occasion, and then the campaign plane would come through, Pat would pick the speech up and he would rework it, and add his own embellishments and then, of course, it would be turned over to Governor Carter who would do more work on it, and add his own ideas to it. So that was what I did for two months and it was a very pleasant experience for me because I grew up in Atlanta and so it was a chance to go back home; it was also a chance to see Pat more often than I would have if I'd stayed in Washington.

ALSOBROOK: Could you also tell me a little bit about your role during the Transition; Was it really a continuation of what you were doing during the campaign?

ANDERSON: No, I made a complete break with that because when we came back to Washington after the campaign, everyone was thinking about what they wanted to do, and the Transition Team was set up, and after thinking it over for awhile, I decided what I really wanted to do was go back to work for Mrs. Carter. So I called Mary and said, "I just want you to know if you have a place on your staff I certainly would like to be considered." And she said, "Oh, I was counting on you." So I immediately plunged back into the press side of it. We set up our office over at the HEW Building with the rest of the Transition. I guess I was just sort of on the phone all day with press people who wanted to interview Mrs. Carter or who wanted to know what she was going to be doing as First Lady.

ALSOBROOK: Ann, what was that period like, was it really hectic; did you feel like you were on the go all the time?

ANDERSON: Yes, it was because, I know that Mary felt this very keenly, we did not really know what our needs were going to be in the White House, and she, Mary particularly, had to come up with a plan as did everyone else on what they were going to be doing in the White House, what kind of staff they were going to need, and what their budget requirements were going to be. And it was really very difficult for us to know at that point.

ALSOBROOK: Did you compile issues books and this sort of thing?

ANDERSON: No, we were not really working on issues at that point. We knew that there were a couple of areas that Mrs. Carter was going to be involved

with, for example, Mental Health, that was one of the things she said during the campaign. So we were beginning, at that point, to be aware, in fact she had had someone on staff during the campaign who also made the transition to the White House, who had been the liaison with the Mental Health people and who was continuing to work with them and answer their requests and try to assure them of how Mrs. Carter might be able to do something for the cause of Mental Health, better Mental Health facilities, and at the same time try to figure out exactly how she could best do something. What she had said during the campaign was that she felt there should be a Presidential Commission for a limited period of time to examine the current issues in Mental Health, to make a complete survey of facilities and methods of treatment and how these had changed over the past ten years or so. So, in fact, this was what happened. I believe it was one of the very first Executive Orders that the President signed and was to set up the President's Commission on Mental Health. Mrs. Carter was originally slated to be the chairman of the commission but then we found out that legally that's not possible. You can't appoint your wife to serve in an authorized capacity like that. So she became the honorary chairman and as the honorary chairman was extremely active, and we felt provided exactly the kind of leadership that she would have had she been the chairman.

ALSOBROOK: This was actually during the Transition period when you were doing a lot of planning for this? Can you recall briefly other issues that began to occupy your time as you looked toward the First Lady's role?

ANDERSON: Well, I would say there were maybe two others that we could see then that were going to turn in to active areas of activities. One was some type of involvement with the problems of the elderly and the other was a program called the Friendship Force, which is a private, non-profit organization that sends groups of people from a city in the United States to a city overseas, in some country overseas.

ALSOBROOK: This is the same program he had when he was Governor of Georgia?

ANDERSON: It was a similar program that they participated in in Georgia. In fact she has pursued both of these interests as First Lady.

ALSOBROOK: Do you recall the first day you came to work in the White House?

ANDERSON: Yes, it was Inauguration Day and it was very cold. A beautiful day. I remember walking down the street. I was staying in a hotel up on Connecticut Avenue, because as you know, I live some distance out in Virginia, so Pat and I thought the best thing to do was just to move into Washington for three days and take part in all these festivities. I was walking down Connecticut Avenue on my way to be here at twelve noon when all the First Lady's Staff was going to meet and go over to the East Wing and sort of move in over there. We had the added, I don't want to say burden, but it really was a tremendous undertaking, that within the first two days of the new administration, the Carters were giving a series of seven receptions for various segments of official Washington. There was the diplomatic group, there were the state Governors, there were the Congress, the military, and then there was a large group that consisted of officials from labor and industry;

we just cut across the spectrum. Each one of these segments had a large reception in the White House right off the bat. We had already sent off the invitations but we were still planning that and we were figuring out how all that was going to work and what we were going to do with the press during these receptions. We came over at twelve o'clock and settled into those offices as quickly as possible. The phone started to ring of course right away. The White House operators had been waiting for us to get there because a lot of reporters were here from out of town, a lot of reporters from Georgia, and they all wanted to come in and be able to cover these things. That was our first day. We started right in, right away. That was a typical day.

ALSOBROOK: Could you perhaps, in a few words, describe what your chief functions were? You've already told me a lot of it.

ANDERSON: Basically, I tried to fill in for Mary wherever possible because she is not only the Press Secretary but the Staff Director, and that role as Staff Director takes really a lot of time away from the press job, in that it just requires her presence at planning meetings, scheduling meetings, and so forth. My primary function was really to answer all of the routine press inquiries that came to the office. I was not Mrs. Carter's spokesman but I could answer questions, for example, about her schedule, her activities, the activities of the rest of the family, what was going on in the White House. At any given time there might be any number of social functions which the Carters may or may not even be participating in, but anything that took place in the Mansion proper was the responsibility of our office. If it was to be covered by the press or whatever, it was a responsibility of the Social Secretary who was on the First Lady's Staff to plan the food and music and so forth. It was the responsibility of the First Lady's Press Office to figure out what, if any, press coverage there would be. Of course, this was even more so when one or both of the Carters was involved. Even if the President was involved it was the First Lady's Staff's responsibility to plan the function and have it covered by the press.

ALSOBROOK: How was it decided how the work would be apportioned? You've described an immense amount of work to be done in your office.

ANDERSON: As I said, sometime back, during the Transition we really didn't know what the demands on us would be and so we set up the staff hoping we would be able to cover all bases with it the way it was set up. We were flexible enough, I think, to make adjustments as we found them. If we were doing too much of this and not enough of that, we would change it around, and Mary would say alright from now on I want you to be responsible specifically for this. One thing that I was responsible for was the press on any of these in-house social functions. I was not technically an advance person, but I did, in fact, do a lot of advance work because that's what we were doing in setting up any kind of social function in the White House, and I was responsible for announcing the events and for writing and distributing any kind of material that we needed, any kind of fact sheets, guest lists, or anything like that. All of that was my responsibility to see that that got into the hands of

the press at the appropriate time.

ALSOBROOK: Ann, did you find in carrying out these duties that there were certain White House offices that you dealt with more than others?

ANDERSON: Yes, I guess the main one was the Usher's Office. We were in constant contact with them. I dealt frequently with the West Wing Press Office. We dealt with the Military Office, the Photo Office. I dealt with the Curator's Office quite a bit, because one of my areas of responsibility was to answer any questions that came from people who were interested in the White House itself as a building and a dwelling and a museum or any of the things that were in the White House, such as the paintings that were brought in on loan to decorate the President's office, and some of which went to decorate the family quarters upstairs. I did quite a bit of work with reporters who were curious about those things.

ALSOBROOK: Were there government agencies you dealt with frequently or did you find you dealt more within the White House and White House Staff units?

ANDERSON: More in the White House. We would deal with a government agency when we had an event that involved a government agency. For example, Mrs. Carter participated in a ceremony involving the handicapped at one point and made a statement about, I think the occasion was that the new laws requiring equal opportunity for the handicapped had become effective. We gathered representatives of public and private organizations dealing with the handicapped and handicapped individuals for a ceremony in the East Room and she made a speech. HEW was involved in that because of the programs of the handicapped come under their area of responsibility. I would deal, for example, with the Press Office at HEW to be sure that the members of the press who normally cover health or anything that has to do with the handicapped specifically would be invited to the ceremony and would be able to get into the White House to cover it.

ALSOBROOK: One question I wanted to ask you too, you told me about many of your experiences in the White House, but as you look back on some of your special projects or assignments, can you think of perhaps one or two that really stand out in your mind as projects that were particularly fulfilling to you or your feel like were particularly significant?

ANDERSON: Yes, I can think of a couple of things. One was a story that I did considerable work on with the New York Times Magazine. I mentioned the paintings that had been brought in. They were interested in doing a color spread on these paintings in the magazine. In talking to the Curator, Mr. Conger, I found that Mrs. Carter had really been very involved, I thought this had basically come from the President, but it turned out that Mrs. Carter was the one who had been very involved in selecting paintings and saying where she would like them to hang and so forth and had been extremely enthusiastic in talking to Mr. Conger about the whole idea of bringing in the American impressionists paintings which happened to be their favorite, the Carters know a good deal about art, and that happens to be their favorite period. So Mr. Conger had gone around and contacted a number of museums and private individuals whom he knew to have collections from this period. They had agreed to lend the White House a number of things. He had brought them all in

and lined them up in the hallway, and then he had brought President and Mrs. Carter out to see them and Mrs. Carter described it as being like Christmas morning because here were all of these beautiful paintings standing against the wall and they could choose, they could say "Oh, we'd love to have this one in the Oval office," or whatever and so they really had quite a collection, just a stunning collection. When the New York Times heard about this we got them interested in coming in and doing an article on it, and we thought that was a good thing to do. One of their reporters came over. They hired a photographer, not one of their own photographers but it is a man in New York whose speciality is photographing art, who does photography for all the really fine art magazines. He knows just how to take a picture of a picture. He and his son came down and spent two days, and we shuffled paintings in and out of the Diplomatic Room and the Map room, and they just had a set up there, and the curator's office would bring in a painting, set it on an easel or they would say where they wanted it. We had to move furniture. It was a tremendous undertaking and it took us two days to do that. At the same time USIA had a photographer over there taking pictures for their distribution purposes. Eventually this became a very nice, a very handsome, piece in the New York Times Magazine, which not only gave the American public a chance to see some of these paintings that were hanging in the White House, some of which are really outstanding examples of American art, but to be perfectly candid, it also identified an interest of President and Mrs. Carter's which I don't think the public was really aware of. It was a very worthwhile thing from that point of view too. Another little thing I can mention, it sounds little, it turned out almost as large an undertaking, it sounds a little bit smaller but this again, I think is typical of the kind of thing that Mrs. Carter does like to do. Apparently it has been traditional when the National Spelling Bee is held in Washington for the group of children to come into the White House. Some years they've come and they've just had a special tour. Mrs. Nixon came down and greeted them and I think maybe Mrs. Ford did the same thing, so they called and they said can we bring the children over after the Spelling Bee is over? We said sure, we'll have a little reception and a little lawn party. Then we began to plan Mrs. Carter's involvement in this, and it turned out that she was willing to come down and talk to them a little bit. Then the people we worked with from the Spelling Bee said would it be possible for us to get a picture of Mrs. Carter with the children. As I got to thinking about this, I thought well you know there were a hundred kids. I think there were two from each state, and I thought it really would not take very much longer for Mrs. Carter to have her picture taken with each child. That way each one could have a souvenir. Let me point out that this Spelling Bee contest was sponsored by the Scripps Howard Newspapers, and each one of these contestants is sponsored by a local Scripps Howard Newspaper, so the child not only had a picture of himself with Mrs. Carter, which she then autographed personally to each child, but the Spelling Bee people also had a picture that they could send to the newspapers and the child would have his picture appear in the paper as a result of this which was awfully nice too. I've no way really of knowing how many of the papers used those pictures, but it took a little bit more time and effort but we thought from the point of view of those children who had come to Washington for the Spelling Bee, we

thought it really paid off.

ALSOBROOK: Did you coordinate the sending of the photographs down to the local papers; were you responsible for all that?

ANDERSON: I did. To be perfectly honest about it, I was the person who had to identify the children. What we did instead of putting a name tag on each child, which wouldn't have shown in the picture really anyway, some of them had their tags on, we had a young lady from the Spelling Bee organization stand at the end of the room with a tape recorder and as each child came in, had his or her picture taken with Mrs. Carter and went on through the door, she would get the names. So we had the names in sequence on a tape. We had the photographs in sequence from the photographers, the numbers from the photographer's frames. We just put those together. You could be reasonably sure that boy/girl had all matched up. After I identified all those I had Mrs. Carter sign a set so that each child would get one with "To Dick Jones from Best Wishes: Rosalyn Carter." So we sent both the sets to the Spelling Bee people and let them distribute to local papers. It was quite a job, but we felt the extra effort was just worth it.

ALSOBROOK: You described it as a little project but it sounds like it turned out to be a very large project. I want to ask you just a couple more questions. Did you have to travel a lot in this job, too?

ANDERSON: I traveled just enough just I think, to make it interesting. I was not the person in the office who did have to do the most traveling because I was not one of the advance people but occasionally we would have a trip with two or three parts that we would have to send extra advance people on to, to do one part while our regular advance people would be doing another part. So I did get to do some advance work. I had some great trips, really. It was terrific. I went to San Francisco and San Diego and I went to El Paso. We had a day-long event that took us back and forth from El Paso into Juarez with the wife of the Mexican President. We had about six stops between those two cities in one day that we had to do.

ALSOBROOK: Was that one of the episodes when Mrs. Carter had a chance to use her Spanish?

ANDERSON: She did, yes. I had several other trips and I enjoyed the travel. I enjoyed getting out. I think the part of my job I liked best was dealing with local press people, getting a chance to break away from Washington, dealing with those local people because you get such a different perspective. Their questions are different; their enthusiasm is different. The whole thing is just very refreshing.

ALSOBROOK: Well, Ann do you think that maybe your future plans might include a position that would involve more travel like that and dealing with local people?

ANDERSON: I think, I feel fairly confident, David, I will end up doing basically the same kind of thing and what I'm leaning toward right now is a position with a government agency where a lot of it will revolve around contacts

with the local press and being sure that the story gets out to those local people. In other words, when you start dealing with a government agency you're getting into things that are taking place all over the country. You're not dealing with the Washington press so much as you're trying to dramatize that in some way on the local level. I would guess I would be doing that.

ALSOBROOK:I want to ask you a couple of little housekeeping questions. You've told me an awful lot about your activities, did you find that you were churning out a lot of paper during this period; did your official files become voluminous?

ANDERSON:I was not too overwhelmed with paper. I kept copies on hand of all the press releases which I was responsible for writing and what we call the fact sheets dealing with any event that we had. I tried to keep a file of those. At the same time, the Central Filing system here is so efficient, any correspondence that I had of course a copy of it came over to Central Files. So I don't have to worry about that because it's already in the files. We did our own little clipping service everyday. We clipped about six of the major papers that covered Mrs. Carter. That was the thing that piled up the highest. I tried to save all those in chronological order. Although again, we had those in files. We had the original clips divided up a different way. I found it very handy to keep those running back for about the past six months, because I would invariably have to refer back to some story that we were trying to find that had been published 2 or 3 weeks ago. But again, copies of those things are all in the Central Files, and so I don't have to save those clips.

ALSOBROOK:Did you find that you created any personal correspondence that you'll probably take home with you?

ANDERSON:No, I don't think so. I can't think of any that I'd take home.

ALSOBROOK:Would you give me a permanent home address and telephone number?

ANDERSON:Yes, Waterford, Virginia. No street address. 22190. And the number is (703) 882-3424.

ALSOBROOK:Ann, I think you've given us an excellent survey of your role in the White House during this period. Is there anything you would like to touch on again that you felt that I perhaps jumped over too quickly, or anything you would like to add about your service?

ANDERSON:No, I can't think of anything David, except that the White House employs the nicest people in the whole world.

ALSOBROOK:Thank you very much.