

Exit Interview with Jeanne Flick, Correspondence Clerk

Interviewer: David Alsobrook, Presidential Papers Staff

Date Not Given, Location Not Given

Transcriber: Lyn B. Kirkland

Alsobrook: If you could just say “testing, 1 2 3.”

Flick: Testing, 1 2 3

Alsobrook: One more time.

Flick: Testing, 1 2 3

Alsobrook: Ok, one more time

Flick: Testing, 1 2 3

Alsobrook: Ok, that’s great. Jeanne, you were telling me a little bit about the positions you held during the Ford administration. Could you sketch in that in a little more detail?

Flick: I started in 1975 as a children’s drafter. There were, there was one supervisor and five of us who handled all the children’s mail that came in and we would analyze the letter and draft original replies and then it was sent to the supervisor and the typing pool to be typed and then sent to review where it was either approved or disapproved and if it was disapproved then, of course, we would rewrite it under President Ford’s directions. Everything was written a certain way...

Alsobrook: Uh huh.

Flick: According to the way he would like his responses and it was usually signed either by the President or by Ronald Elliott who was the director of correspondence at that time.

Alsobrook: Were you using the auto pen then for the President?

Flick: Yes, for both of them.

Alsobrook: Uh huh. Elliott had an auto pen too. Has that procedure changed in this administration? I don’t guess you’ve done children’s mail in this administration.

Flick: I started out reading children’s mail when President Carter came in to the administration. I did that shortly, and, well, for a time, and then I was transferred to the 4th floor where I started reading US bulk mail from the general public and thus there was no creativity in that respect

cause it was more or less robo, robo answered letters so that's when I really stopped drafting special replies and started reading bulk mail from the general public, mainly adult mail, or charging it out to certain agencies that would then handle it their way, but of course under the guise of the President.

Alsobrook: Was a lot of that bulk mail left over from the transition period too?

Flick: Some of it was in the early stages, that's while we were working in the Indian treaty room. When President Carter first came into the administration and that was bulk mail from the transition. A lot of it was support mail, 'Congratulations, we're glad you are now the President.' At that time, of course, there was a transition, there were Ford letters going out and you learned to do it the way that the Carter administration would prefer it.

Alsobrook: And so what was a difference though, I mean in the way that it was handled?

Flick: The difference was that, I mean, the Carter administration in my viewpoint, was that we did read much, much more mail and it was not answered as thoroughly as under the Ford administration. But then that, that was the way that I interpreted because, you know, under the Ford administration I did original drafting and when I moved to the Carter administration I no longer did that and I read bulk mail and we had about on average of at least 300 pieces of mail a day, so we read it and we coded it and it was sent out either to the typing pool or to agencies. It was handled on the basis of the way the Ford administration handled it except there was no review unit. So everything went out either one way, right or wrong. We would later get notices that maybe we had charged it out incorrectly. Charging out meaning sending it to another agency. So basically to compare the two in my viewpoint, the Ford administration was a little more careful, more select, and they did not read as much mail but it was quality work versus at the time of the Ford-Carter transition it was 'read as much as you can and get it out.' And that viewpoint has changed though. It's no longer handled in the same way. There is more quality emphasis rather than quantity, quality rather than quantity.

Alsobrook: Do you think that's because the bulk has fallen off a lot?

Flick: The bulk has never really fallen off. During summers in the Ford administration the mail would be light and we would have an easing up period. Maybe we would go to another office and address birthday and anniversary greetings but it never really fell off in the Carter administration when I was reading mail. It's still heavy as I understand it. I have not been doing that at the present time.

Alsobrook: Now who was your supervisor during the time you were doing bulk mail? Do you remember?

Flick: My supervisor became Lilly Bell at that time and she is still presently the head of that.

Alsobrook: And Lana Kite was over at...?

Flick: Lana Kite became the director of correspondence.

Alsobrook: OK. And so after a while, you know, you mentioned that you moved on from bulk mail to...?

Flick: And I really moved on from reading bulk mail and mail analysis to what was called special projects.

Alsobrook: OK

Flick: I've been in special projects for a year and a half now and that started out with Adrian Lewis, myself, Carol Johnston, a few other people and we would go over names and addresses so that if a staff member needed a list of certain names and addresses, those that attended a White House briefing, those who were expertise in oil or nuclear weapons, or whatever. We could draw from this list of names and addresses and furnish that staff member with that particular list and it progressed into a project whereby we would input or have someone input names and addresses of those who attended certain White House briefings, say those who attended an Ann Wexler briefing. We would get those and then Anne Wexler's office would then run letters off of those names and addresses and send out a thank you note for attending that briefing or a follow up letter shortly, or just maintain that name and address for future reference.

Alsobrook: I was curious, where did you get your original list from of people?

Flick: The original list came from staff members but they were either handwritten or they were computerized but they were not coded. And so a staff member, say I worked on Bill Simmons' list of approximately 12,000 names, and I was up on the 5th floor for about two months just coding every name. We would code it for individual classifications such as for a lawyer, or for a doctor, or one who attended a small business council meeting. They would be coded as to a system that, well, for Bill Simmons I set up, and for others that we coded were already set up through Val Giannini. There was a coding process at first and then we would hand it over to those that could input it and they would do input.

Alsobrook: Keying these things into the computer?

Flick: Keying into the computer with a Hewlett Packard 3000 computer. And that was a larger project than we had ever anticipated. We thought maybe it would last a month or two months. It turned out it nearly lasted a year with us doing it. And then it went to central reference where it's still maintained.

Alsobrook: And that's where it is now?

Flick: And that's where it is now but I am no longer with that special project.

Alsobrook: Is there a relationship between that project and the people who do research like in Hamilton Jordon's office; you know, people like Betty Rainwater and Steven Slade, I guess, and some of those people. Is there any connection there between the work that y'all did and ...?

Flick: Probably so. I know Steven Slade is well versed in what goes on in central reference and everything basically has the same coding system but it was more or less created and it was called the data bank.

Alsobrook: Uh huh.

Alsobrook: Under Val Gia-, and it was the first time that any administration had ever had the use of computers so it was a pilot project that did well, I think.

Alsobrook: Was that Ralph Peck working on that?

Flick: Now Ralph Peck was definitely one of the ones who was a liaison between the special projects, data bank, and other offices, staff members. Hugh and Val Giannini did coordinate getting this going and we worked also with the military office. They would show us how to input, show us how to get print outs, show us how to do mailing labels, and we do that quite often.

Alsobrook: Uh huh.

Flick: We would run mailing labels, I know when the special projects office moved to Central Reference at one point I did a mailing for Diane Hanson who works for Millie Martin and we needed mailing labels of it was a little over 9000 names. You would get a notice maybe two weeks, but staff members were constantly adding new names and addresses which had to be coded if we knew who they were. Sometimes we would just get names and addresses from staff members and of course we just gave it a general classification. But if she needed that mailing, those mailing labels then we would usually use the military office to get them out quickly because in Central Reference they had a mailing, they could make mailing labels but it would only hold about 300, whereas the military office could print out 9000 within a few hours.

Alsobrook: That's amazing. Were there were certain events during the course of the early years of the administration that must have led to your having to create mailing labels? You mentioned Diane Hanson's mail out. Were there other times?

Flick: There were other times such as with Anne Wexler when she, oh, the SALT briefings, I guess, were the crux of it. We had so many SALT briefings and so many, so many people who attended or maybe did not attend that they wanted to keep track of for future reference, but I guess the SALT briefings; the hospital cost containment was another big issue, but a lot of energy and tax messages were all given to the data bank to maintain these names and addresses.

Alsobrook: Huh. That was really some project. That's really interesting. After you left there, where did you go?

Flick: I was in, I was there until October of this year, excuse me, of '79, and then I went with Steven Slade, O. G. Lewis, Evan Mathias, Mary Elizabeth Burton to the Christmas card project. And this again involved names and addresses, of course. We would, the four of us went to the new Executive Office Building where we could monitor the volunteers who would come in and hand address these names and addresses that were given to us by staff members. So again it was like the data bank. There were no mailing labels involved, no rush project. It was simply to get the Christmas cards out and almost, almost 100,000 cards were sent.

Alsobrook: Gracious. All hand...

Flick: All hand addressed. We would supervise volunteers of about 40 to 60 a day and they, there were 1200 volunteers in all which meant that most of the time they were not repeats but they were those who had never been here before so we would give the same spiel almost daily. We would do this six days a week with the volunteers who stayed 9 to 3. So, every time we had a new group of volunteers, which was almost daily, we would explain to them how we needed, how the Carter administration needed these names and addresses to be addressed and there was a certain format for that, a certain procedure that we thought would look, would look nice on the envelope and the volunteers worked very, very hard and December the 11th there was a tea held for them over in the White House with Mrs. Carter to show their appreciation. And cards were sent out even, they were supposed to be sent out the 13th and 14th but it was even as late as about the Tuesday before Christmas that we could get them all out because of staff members giving us a few more names at the last minute.

Alsobrook: Is that the way they came in, they came in in little trickles, the names?

Flick: They came in in the beginning on print outs. Steven Slade had coordinated and gotten from various staff members. Then he would put them in, he would ask for them by the last name and ask for them by state so when we looked at the print outs we would have them by state and by last name, and a volunteer would usually address about 200 cards a day.

Alsobrook: A day, uh huh.

Flick: In the time that she was there.

Alsobrook: What was the most difficult thing about that project?

Flick: The time factor. We worked many hours overtime and the fact that we were, we were very conscientious. We wanted every envelope to look as well as it could, so of course many had to be addressed again. They were proofed but because they were usually proofed by friends of different groups that came in, we felt like maybe they wouldn't bring it to our attention because it was addressed by a friend of theirs, so often we would readdress them just so we could

get them to look as nicely as possible. And another thing was we wanted to catch duplicates. We hated for a person to receive a duplicate card.

Alsobrook: Had that ever happened?

Flick: That's happened.

Alsobrook: Did the person send it back to you?

Flick: Well, they would write a letter, usually to the mail analysis section saying they had gotten three cards. And we would... in the years past. We would check but when you get a list from one staff member and you get a list from another staff member and maybe a third list from another staff member with that person's name on it three times, they would not always catch. So we tried to eliminate duplicates as best as possible.

Alsobrook: Yeah, I think I read something about this in the paper. But did you have to be really careful about how you financed the mailing all these cards and stamps and everything. I guess the DNC would have to pay for part of it. Is that the way it worked?

Alsobrook: As best as I understand, the DNC paid for all the stamps, envelopes, and cards. The President paid for his personal cards, his family members and very close friends. So he would pay for the stamps, the cards, the envelopes for family and friends. The DNC as I understand it paid for the others.

Alsobrook: So, you had to, your staff had to carefully monitor that?

Flick: We counted every envelope that ever went out. We would give 33 envelopes per computer print out to a volunteer because that way they would know to be careful, not address any to any of their friends, maintain neatness because they had to get another envelope from a supervisor such as myself, so they were, they were aware that we were monitoring because of the cost, number one, and secondly we wanted it to be a job that they knew that we were proud to be associated with and careful. You know, pilferage took place.

Alsobrook: Did the First Lady or the President, you know you mentioned that tea, did the First Lady or the President ever come by and see any of this activity?

Flick: Not to my knowledge.

Alsobrook: Seems like in years past, I think maybe last year or the year before I've heard that I think maybe one of them had.

Flick: I'm not sure.

Alsobrook: You know, in all of the things that you have been involved in here are there certain projects or certain jobs that have given you a great deal of personal satisfaction, you know, as you think back about your time?

Flick: Definitely when I was working with the data bank and there was a rush project. Sarah Weddington, I remember one night needed a, on a Friday night, needed a list of names. She had not used the data bank very much and I worked with Glen Powers who was working for Sarah Weddington then, and we got it together and she, Glen took it to Sarah Weddington that night, and this was probably about 8:30 or 9:00 at night, and gave it to Sarah Weddington and she was very pleased at the rate that it could be, this list of her names and addresses, could be produced and look as well as it did, with certain codes that she wanted. I've really forgotten what code she needed but I remember I had to retrieve certain names from a certain state and she probably had at that time maybe 5000 names in the system and we did a special project with the computer, a special process, and then we would be able to retrieve those names, from say by California with a certain code that she wanted. And there was one case where, I know we only got three names out of all 5000 but that didn't matter, that's exactly what she wanted, so she was very pleased. And I remember working, it was fairly late at night, to get it to her and she had to take it to that particular state. Maybe was Ohio, I'm not sure, but she needed it that next morning, which was Saturday morning. And we were able to furnish her with what she wanted.

Alsobrook: And she took them with her?

Flick: She took that name, that print out of names and addresses with her.

Alsobrook: Huh. That's amazing

Flick: I know that sounds beneficial to me, I felt somewhat proud to have been associated with the *rush* project. I enjoyed that.

Alsobrook: Have you had any other government experiences?

Flick: No, I've never.

Alsobrook: In your own opinion what's the most difficult thing about working in the White House? You probably have friends who have other government jobs. Is this different do you think so from working in Labor or Justice or...?

Flick: The only thing I can think of is that with the White House office, and I have been here almost five years, I lack a month, is that we have had always to work compulsory Saturdays and that may be minute but it's, it has been, I always work every other Saturday and I know my other government friends never work weekends. That's really the only thing that I can ever think of.

Alsobrook: Uh huh.

Flick: I have really enjoyed it tremendously. And I'm going to hate to leave.

Alsobrook: [Laughs] You know, as you think back about some of the perks associated with this job, are there certain things that stand out in your mind, maybe some exceptional occasions here?

Flick: Oh yes, I when I first started here had never used a 35 mm camera and I remember going to my first arrival ceremony, seeing the President of the United States, seeing the head of state, completely devastated by the whole affair, and I was even there, so I remember I rushed out and bought a 35 mm camera and I have had utmost pleasure with it because I was able to attend these arrival ceremonies that I never would have, never, and I have been able to see, say, the Queen Elizabeth, Juan Carlos of Spain, Trudeau when he was in town. Actually got very, very close and just amazed by it all. I have had the very good fortune, aside from attending the beautiful White House Christmas parties, I have a friend named Landon Brent, who has, he is a friend of Chip Carter's, Jeff Carter's and through him I have been able to, you know, party with the Carter children many, many times. I have attended movies in the White House. The last one I saw was Star Trek. The President was there. It's just overwhelming. I just, I would never have had this opportunity and I am always totally amazed, I just almost faint every time I see the President or Hamilton Jordan or Jody Powell or anyone because they have such responsibility that oftentimes the general public, you know, forgets. But I have been in the White House upstairs in the family unit.

Alsobrook: Oh, have you? On special assignments and so on?

Flick: No, just on my own, just partying with them.

Alsobrook: Is there a side of this particular first family that you think the average person out in the street has never seen, you know, that you feel like you've seen?

Flick: Definitely. I don't know the children and the President very well but I have met them on a social situation and they are just so unbelievably down to earth and friendly, and they remember you. They know I'm leaving. It just meant a great deal to me to be able to talk to them, you know, in the situation that they are.

Alsobrook: It's a pretty difficult way to live, though, isn't it?

Flick: I would think it would be. Oftentimes they probably have to take the criticism personally. I know I would if I were in that situation. It would affect me tremendously. I don't know if I could hold up to the criticism that people give them and not understand the issue at all, but just flatly criticize anything and everything, and that would be a burden, that I know the family is aware of that I don't see how they do it and put up with it day to day.

Alsobrook: I guess it was Jeff- was it Jeff and Annette that recently moved out?

Flick: They moved out recently from the White House mansion and Chip is still living there. Jeff and Annette moved to Virginia.

Alsobrook: Do they seem to like their lives outside the White House?

Flick: I think so. Last time I saw them was a few days before Christmas and Annette had Jeff and Chip and Landon and about 14 other people over to tre- the Star Trek movie and I remember thinking, I had forgotten that they had moved out of the mansion and they walked in with their coats and then I remembered they don't live here anymore. [Alsobrook laughs] But they have been looking for a house for some time, various places and... Jeff works, of course with the campaign, but also for a computer service and... Quite, quite talented, intellectual, articulate children. They know, they just, they can talk about anything. It's amazing to hear them.

Alsobrook: I was curious. Does it, it sounds like they haven't even been affected by being in the White House and having...

Flick: I think it's just their nature, just... They are just so humble, it seems like, that they wouldn't let being in the White House, you know, stand in the way of being genuine.

Alsobrook: How about the President? You've seen the President at, you've mentioned movies and so on. Is there a side of him that the average person doesn't see?

Flick: Oh definitely. Well, as far as I can tell. I remember when the Star Trek movie was coming on, it's total darkness for a while and he was sitting in a chair in front of me and to the right by one chair and I heard him say that, it was total darkness, the screen was total darkness, and he said, this is a film about the black hole. I mean, he was so clever and quick. [Alsobrook laughs.] Not being a Star Trek fan I just kept watching total darkness but he saw it as, "black hole." And, I don't know, he's so comfortable looking all the time. He's in jeans and sweater and shirt. He walked in, he looked very, very tired, of course, with the Iranian situation. And, it was just good to see him take a breather from that and watch a movie. Of course, he left fairly soon after that, he waved to the crowd and said thanks for coming.

Alsobrook: So, he didn't stay for the whole movie?

Flick: He stayed for the whole movie but he didn't stay to chit chat so to speak.

Alsobrook: Was Rosalyn with him too?

Flick: No, it was just him.

Alsobrook: Have you ever seen them together on any of these occasions?

Flick: Not in the movie theater but I've seen them on the south lawn in the, at the summer picnics.

Alsobrook: Uh huh. Does she jog on the south lawn too?

Flick: I understand that she does.

Alsobrook: I have heard that he jogs regularly.

Flick: He definitely does. And I understand that she follows him sometimes as with the-

Alsobrook: And the Secret Service I guess jogs.

Flick: And definitely Secret Service.

Alsobrook: Jeanne, did you have the same opportunity to see the Ford children and family like you did this family?

Flick: No, the only time that I ever saw the Ford family was at the White House Christmas party. One time Jack Ford came in to thank us for doing such a good job. I believe it was near the end of the Ford administration. President Carter was stepping in about that time. It might have been like a few days before President Ford left and Jack, no Steve Ford, the youngest son, came in to tell us thank you. But other than that I never saw them. I never even knew anyone who knew them and I probably would not have met the Carter children as many times as I did if it weren't for Landon. And Landon and I are still best friends, of course.

Alsobrook: And so you will probably continue to see the children in years to come.

Flick: I think so. And I live in upstate New York so I, of course, I invite them all if they are ever out campaigning, they certainly have a place to stay.

Alsobrook: Is that your home? Are you originally from New York?

Flick: No.

Alsobrook: Are you from this area?

Flick: I'm from Roanoke, Virginia, originally.

Alsobrook: Oh, I see. I was about to go ahead and ask you how you ended up working in the Ford White House. How did that come about?

Flick: It was in 1974 that I was a claims adjuster for an insurance company and they had a reduction in staff, so I lost my job and I just immediately called my cousin who works here to ask her if she knew of any job possibilities and I would even move to Washington.

Alsobrook: Uh huh. Tomorrow night.

Flick: It seemed a long ways away.

Alsobrook: Sure.

Flick: She said she thought there might be some openings after the New Year's which was 1975, so I came up. I interviewed. I waited about a week. The jobs were frozen but there were

openings. It just happened that I was hired. The jobs became unfrozen. I only had to wait six weeks to get another job and I started doing drafting of children's letters which I just love to do because it took some originality. That's how I started here.

Alsobrook: You mentioned upstate New York. What are your plans up there? Can you tell me anything about your future plans?

Flick: The reason I'm moving to upstate New York is that my boyfriend is a lieutenant in the United States Army and he will be stationed in Ovid in Romulus, New York area. He's asked me to go with him and he will be there for three years, so if I don't go I won't see him so I'm going. He is with the explosive ordnance disposal unit. In fact he will be probably working closely with the Secret Service with the various campaigns and I know he will be going to the Olympics in February to cover that because the President, more than likely, will be there or someone from the Presidential family.

Alsobrook: Do you think you will have the chance to go to Lake Placid yourself?

Flick: I want to. I think I will. [Laughs] Somehow.

Alsobrook: Have you got a job lined up too?

Flick: No, I don't have a job. I've been looking. I've been trying to do it by mail, calling various offices, but without them really seeing me in person, it's been difficult. I don't know this particular person but I've talked with her several times on the phone. She is head of the Democratic National Committee in Ithaca and I called her knowing she was that just to ask her if she knew of anything, anybody, and she did- and of course she does not know me still. But when I move to upstate New York next week she wants to get together with me and, you know, hopefully she has some leads and knows of someone who needs some help with whatever they do. She knows a few professors at Cornell. Cornell is not that far away and she knows I've been with the White House office, so I'm looking forward to meeting her. She sounds like a very dynamic person and she's willing to help me not knowing me even. So, she will be my contact for a job up there.

Alsobrook: That's great. Jeanne, I have one last question to ask you because I know you said that at 4:30 you need to catch a ride, I think. Do you have a permanent address and telephone number where we can reach you, like several years from now? Any parents or relatives who have a more permanent address than you have in New York?

Flick: I can give you my name and address at this time but I do not have a phone yet.

Alsobrook: OK. That's fine because at some future date somebody at the Carter Library might want to talk with you in more detail about your experience here, this is just an interview to sketch in the boundaries of your work, or maybe somebody from the Ford Library might want to talk to you about your experience in that administration. So that address will be fine.

Flick: OK. My name is Jeanne Flick, 5 Timber Lake Terrace, Ovid O V I D, New York, 14521.

Alsobrook: OK. Is there any alumni association or anything like that where we can always get in touch with you or who would know where you were located like ten years from now?

Flick: My parents are still in Roanoke.

Alsobrook: Alright. Could you give me their name and address?

Flick: Yeah, they're names are Mr. and Mrs. Carl C A R L Firebaugh F I R E B A U G H, Route 1 Box 677, Roanoke, Va., 24012. They live with my grandmother who is Mrs. T. D. Zimmerman.

Alsobrook: OK. I think that's fine. That's more than enough information for us. But, I know busy, you know, checking out and everything, I appreciate your time. I enjoyed talking to you.

Flick: Thank you for the experience.