WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH DEE DEE MYERS

June 2–3, 2005
Charlottesville, Virginia

Participants

University of Virginia

Russell Riley, chair
Paul Freedman

Rhodes College

Michael Nelson

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Russell Riley: This is the Dee Dee Myers oral history interview and part of the Clinton Presidential History Project. First, I want to thank you very much for coming here and subjecting yourself to this process. I hope you'll find it as interesting and as enjoyable as we do. I think most of the people who come through here actually find this a little therapeutic and enjoyable—a trip down memory lane. Some of the memories are good, some of them not so good, but overall we try to make this a fairly painless process.

We had this scheduled before and it didn't work out for personal reasons, and you were so good to allow us to go ahead and jump right back in and reschedule. I also want to thank both of my other interviewers for consenting to do this. It's nice to be able to maintain the team, given the fact that there has been a fair amount of energy invested in this.

There are a couple of things that we do at the beginning of every interview as a way of housekeeping. I'll note for the record that you and I have had a conversation before we came in, reviewing the ground rules and making sure you don't have any questions. I always like to repeat the most fundamental ground rule, that the proceedings are being conducted under a veil of confidentiality, that you are the only person who is free to report outside the room anything that is said within the room, at least until a cleared transcript is released in a few years' time, and that will become the authoritative record of the interview.

All of my colleagues here in the room have taken the vow of silence on this, and I'm pleased to say that we have an unblemished record of maintaining those confidences. It's the currency of the realm in terms of making sure that people feel comfortable talking with us.

The second thing is a voice check. We'll go around and I'll ask each of you to say who you are and to say a few words so that the transcriber will know whose name to associate with which voice. Jess will also be keeping a record of the interventions and also any proper names that might come out. She'll probably stop you during the breaks to see if there's one that's unfamiliar to her, again also as an aid to the transcriber. I'm Russell Riley. I'm an associate professor here at the Miller Center and I've been heading up the Clinton Presidential History Project.

Dee Dee Myers: I'm Dee Dee Myers, the subject of today's debriefing as it were, and the only girl voice you'll probably hear.

Riley: That hasn't gone unnoted by the person who organized the panel, and I probably should apologize for that.

Myers: Not a problem, just a fact.

Michael Nelson: I'm Mike Nelson, and I teach political science at Rhodes College in Memphis.

Paul Freedman: I'm Paul Freedman. I teach politics here at the University of Virginia.

Riley: One of the things that we always like to begin with is a little bit of personal biography. You came out of a military household, is that correct?

Myers: I did. My dad was a career naval officer who spent two tours in Vietnam, among other things. He got out in 1969. We moved to LA [Los Angeles] County and he went to work for Lockheed.

Riley: So there was some stability at that point.

Myers: Yes. We moved seven times in my first seven years, and then my parents didn't move again for a long time. So unlike a lot of Navy kids, I went to junior high and high school in the same place, which was, I think, a blessing, although kids do well; they adapt.

Riley: And you have siblings?

Myers: I have a sister one year older and a sister one year younger—Irish triplets. [*laughter*]

I'm the middle one of three girls.

Riley: Did you inherit your parents' political sensibilities, or are your Democratic inclinations a break from tradition?

Myers: Growing up, my parents weren't particularly political. My earliest political memory was that I grew up in a Catholic family and my parents voted for John Kennedy in 1960. I'm sure my dad voted for [Lyndon] Johnson in '64. Then I don't think he voted for a Democrat for a long time. My mom was nominally a Republican for a long time. She has since seen the light and is now a fairly ardent Democrat.

My earliest political memory was in second grade. My father was in Vietnam, and we were living in Racine, Wisconsin, with my grandmother, because my dad knew he would be getting out when he came back. During the '68 election, my grandmother was for [Hubert] Humphrey because she thought he would end the war, and my mother was for [Richard] Nixon. I can remember being for Humphrey, I know not why, but going around school saying, "Humphrey, Humphrey, he's our man. Just throw [Richard] Nixon in the garbage can!" For some reason the Democratic connect started for me very early. But I wasn't particularly political until I got to college.

Riley: Were either of your siblings political?

Myers: My older sister ended up working in the Clinton administration as well. She was the first director of the White House Office of Women's Initiatives and Outreach. She worked at the Small Business Administration for Erskine Bowles, then she was at the White House, and then

she went to SBA [Small Business Administration]. Now she's at Harvard. She worked for David Gergen as the executive director of his Center on Public Leadership.

Riley: Given later developments, that's an interesting—

Myers: Yes, it is. My younger sister is a makeup artist. She works on TV and movies and lives in Los Angeles, a very different career track.

Riley: So how did you end up tracking into a political career on your own?

Myers: I was interested in politics in high school, but I didn't identify with a party. I graduated from high school in 1979. I was sort of apolitical, at least in the suburbs of Los Angeles where I grew up. There was no political activity on campus, but I do remember doing a paper on the signing of the peace accords with President [Jimmy] Carter and just reading the newspaper daily and arguing with my teachers in high school.

Then when I went to a Jesuit college, Santa Clara, there was somehow the collision of all the things I accepted as a child into a more intellectual Jesuit environment that was willing to challenge everything, from religion to politics. I became quite politicized by it. I think that also crashed up against the Catholic social mission, which is why I ended up being a Democrat. I no longer consider myself Catholic. I've done what all Catholics do when they leave the church, become Episcopalian, which is Catholic-like. What really motivated me was the notion that it wasn't just a good idea to help the less fortunate; you're morally obligated to do so.

I looked around in 1979, or when I graduated from college, in 1983, and I thought that President [Ronald] Reagan was not making the world and the country fairer, so I went to work for something called Citizen Action League, which was an organization that canvassed for lower utility rates for seniors and people with disabilities. I did that for a while. It was a great experience. Then I went to work for [Walter] Mondale. I just called the Democratic Party headquarters and said, "Where's the Mondale headquarters?" They didn't really have one yet.

Riley: This was the state headquarters?

Myers: Yes. I was living in LA, so I ended up at the law firm of Mickey Kantor, because he was the nominal state chairman. That's how I met Mickey Kantor and went to work for him, calling elected officials. He or one of his assistants would give me a list and say, "Call these elected officials. Tell them Mondale is coming in; they should meet us at the airport." So I'd get on the phone and call Supervisor Kenny Hahn's office or whoever and say, "Vice President Mondale will be landing at—" That was my first job, and it was thrilling, I thought. When we opened an office, I found the office space. I was the office manager, the volunteer coordinator.

Riley: You were paid staff at this point?

Myers: Yes. I think was making $900 a month, barely paid. I figured out a way to live on it—roommates. During the primary campaign I watched what was happening. I'd been an editor of my college newspaper, so I was interested in that nexus of politics and journalism. I decided the press secretary had the most interesting job, so I went to work for her in the general election. She happened to be on leave from her job as the press secretary to the mayor of Los Angeles, who

was then Tom Bradley. We are still close. She just finished her PhD at Michigan State in political science, kind of a late thing.

After the Mondale campaign, I went to work for a state senator named Art Torres, who is currently chairman of the Democratic Party in California. Then I went to work for Tom Bradley, for whom I worked for a number of years. He was wonderful. He was really a remarkable person. The older I get, the more I realize how much influence he had and what an important role model he was for me. He was one of the fairest, most understated people, but he had a lot of dignity and he'd come through a lot.

It took me years to understand his story, because it wasn't something he talked about. He went to UCLA [University of California–Los Angeles] on a track and baseball scholarship and played with Jackie Robinson—both track and football—Jackie played baseball. I guess UCLA qualified for the Orange Bowl in '41 and they went down to LSU [Louisiana State University] to play and LSU refused to field their team because there were these two black guys, so they forfeited the game. Bradley told me what it was like to go to Ebbetts Field to see Jackie Robinson's first game, which was quite amazing. By then he was on the city council—No, he was a cop—that was '47. What an exciting and inspiring moment that had been for him as a young man.

I was 23 years old when I went to work for him. He was the first person who treated me like an actual grown-up, like the actual politician. He'd listen to me. "What did So-and-So say? What do you think he's going to ask me about in this interview?" That was a really formative experience. He was probably 65 by that point. He was a big guy, about 6' 4", giant hands, really a wonderful man.

Riley: And your association with Mickey Kantor—

Myers: Mickey was part of Bradley's kitchen cabinet.

Riley: What can you tell us about him? What were you finding out about Mickey Kantor at this point? He's somebody who obviously plays an important role later on down the road.

Myers: Right.

Riley: Were you picking up that this was somebody who had a unique skill set? You just said that Bradley himself, because of his biography—

Myers: Yes. Mickey was a really energetic guy, sort of peripatetic. I don't know if you have talked to him yet.

Riley: Yes.

Myers: He had a Rolodex. For me, as a kid, to come in—He knew everybody. When you said you were calling from Mickey Kantor's office, people took your call, which was my first experience with that. I came from a totally different world. Mickey was the first person that I'd been around who was the guy who got stuff done. That was his role. He was Mondale's guy and he got it done. Whatever Mondale needed in California, Mickey was the guy who got it done. Ironically, down the hall from him is a young partner at the firm, which was Manatt, Phelps,

Rothenberg & Tunney at that time. Mickey's name was on the door. There was a guy named John Emerson. Have you talked to Emerson yet?

Riley: No.

Myers: I think he was 32. He was Gary Hart's chief guy in California. He went on to become political. He was very close to Clinton. I think he was number two in politics when he ran California for Clinton.

Riley: In '92?

Myers: He worked on the campaign in the White House. He worked in political affairs. He's still close to both Clintons. He's back in Los Angeles working for an investment group. That's interesting, because both campaigns were being run off the same floor of this law firm. It wasn't that big of a firm. It wasn't that big of a floor, so I'd cruise down to John, chat him up, and see if I could get any intelligence about what was happening—I figured out pretty early on that it could be useful for me to bring back little bits and pieces of intelligence about what the Hart people were doing. It was fun and exciting, but then we got our own office and moved out of that law firm.

Then Mickey—I didn't see him as much. We had a state director by that point, but he was somebody that I remained friendly with, and like I said, he was part of Bradley's kitchen cabinet. Again, he was a guy who got things done, not just at the firm but around town. After I worked for Bradley—Bradley ran for Governor in 1986 and he lost. But we had a great time on that campaign. Then I went to work for [Michael] Dukakis. He gave me a leave. He was very supportive of my restlessness. He would always make it possible for me to go off and do what I wanted to and come back. So I went to work for Dukakis, first as an advance person—

Riley: This is in '88?

Myers: Eighty-eight. I started doing advance for him in 1987, and Bradley would let me go off for a week and come back.

Nelson: So you were with Dukakis during the primaries?

Myers: I was with him very early, yes. I actually had a relationship with him that far exceeded my lowly role. I was stunned; he actually knew my name, which was a big deal. I'd see him and he'd come off the plane, "Hi Dee, how are you?" That would make my whole week.

Riley: You were doing the national campaign rather than the California?

Myers: I was, but as an advance person. So you go off—I did mostly press advance. We'd set up the events and then I'd come back. You didn't make enough money, really, and the campaign would go into dormant periods early on, so I'd come back to Los Angeles and go back to work in the mayor's office. Then I guess I finally left the mayor's office for good probably in the spring of '88. But I was the press secretary for the state primary. Then I went back on the road with the convention and then in the general election came back to California again, where I worked for

John Podesta's brother, Tony, who was the state director. It's a very small world, Democratic politics. Mark Gearan's wife, Mary Herlihy, was part of that team.

Then when Dukakis lost—That was November of '88—Bradley was up for reelection in the spring of '89, so I went back in. It wasn't a difficult reelection, but it got bogged down. He got caught up in some financial crisis. He'd been director of a bank and he had been compensated for it and it became an issue. But anyway, he won that. He was reelected in the spring of '89 and I went right from there to work for Dianne Feinstein.

Riley: I want to ask you about Bradley. Was that a useful place to learn ethnic politics? I ask the question because, as an outsider, it's not evident that he was somebody who traded on that politically as his strong suit.

Myers: It was less that because when he was first elected mayor in 1973, he had run in '69 against Sam Yorty and lost and then ran again in '83 against Yorty and won. The way he did it—that was obviously before I was with him—was a kind of a legend. He was the first black big-city mayor and he did it by putting—LA has a small black population, maybe 7 or 8 percent. It's small. By building a coalition between blacks and Jews, middle-class voters, he was able to appeal to them. What I learned from him was how to appeal beyond your natural constituencies. He was, by nature, a committed Democrat. His picture with Martin Luther King—He was very proud of his association with civil rights leaders, but he was much less likely to be on the barricades than he was in the boardroom working the deals.

It was unions and it was labor; it was blacks; it was Jews. He figured out a way to reach out to middle-class Angelinos. He was reelected four times. It was fun being with him, because wherever you went—You'd be on a construction site downtown and, "Hey, Mayor Tom." It was always "Mayor Tom." He was 6' 4" and carried himself straight up. He always had his coat and tie on. He was very proper, and yet he loved that part. He loved when the guys in the hard hats or whoever would stop and feel like he was their mayor.

Nelson: He'd been a cop.

Myers: He'd been a cop. It wasn't exactly a good experience for him, by the way, because he was very limited in his ability. He could never make detective because he was black. As we all now know, the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] has a deep history of racist culture, which always made him very suspicious. He did not have a great relationship—Daryl Gates was the chief for much of the time, and it was a quasi-independent police commission that controlled that appointment. It was very difficult for him to deal with.

Again, he was a moderate by temperament and by necessity. He believed very strongly that he needed to balance business interests with environmental interests. Economic growth was very important to him, and having relationships with the business community, which we then parlayed into the 1984 Olympics. Remember, Olympics were not big profitable things until '84. Bradley did well with the help and cooperation of the business community working closely with him, despite the fact that it wasn't an obvious connection.

The city made $200 million or some crazy figure at the time. No one had ever heard of such a thing. It was all predicted to be such a disaster. He was very stubborn. He was going to bring the

Olympics, damn it, and he did. He was going to build a subway, damn it, and he did. I don't know if that's been as successful as the Olympics, but there's mass transit now in LA. It doesn't really get you where you need to go, but it's there. He was remarkable.

Riley: The Republican Party in California has been very fruitful ground for Presidential candidates. Are you finding out interesting things about the Republican Party in California at this time?

Myers: Well, the Republican Party in California is really a broken operation.

Riley: This is true of the time that we're talking about?

Myers: No, it was a little bit different then. Kennedy carried California and then I think Clinton was the next Democrat to carry California. I guess Johnson did in '64, but I think that Clinton was the next Democrat to carry California. It was just a tough state. Obviously it produced Nixon and Reagan. But in the 25 years since Reagan, the Republican Party has become a very right-wing party. It's way out of step with the mainstream, and as a result, the state is dysfunctional in so many ways. That's partly because the initiative process has made government—You're so hemmed in.

Arnold [Schwarzenegger] is finding that out. Arnold isn't really a Republican. Even if he hadn't been born in Austria, he could never win a national Republican primary. He's pro-choice, pro–gay rights, pro-environment. He was for the new auto emission standards for selling cars in California. I think it's within 12 years they have to meet higher standards, which is a short time frame. So he could never win as a national candidate, even though he very much considers himself a Republican. And I thought he *killed* at the convention. I went to see him specifically.

I walked around to ask, and heard people say, "Glad he's Republican, but he's not our kind of Republican." By the end, they're like "Whooo, whooo, change—Which amendment is it that says you have to be a natural-born citizen?" That's interesting, but I don't think that presages a revival of the Republican Party. There will always be Republicans who can succeed, but they will not necessarily be the same who can succeed nationally as in the past. Although if you had a Reagan figure, somebody with that level of charisma—Reagan understood how to surf the tides.

Riley: My question was partly one of your own political education. You're working with Democrats in a particular state. Is what you're finding out about Republicans in California providing you useful lessons that you generalize from? Or was the party so dysfunctional that—

Myers: It was less dysfunctional then than it is now. Less so in Los Angeles, where it's an allegedly nonpartisan office and it's a Democratic city. So you have Republicans, but they're not as important. I did two Governor's races—one when Tom Bradley ran against George Deukmejian, who was then the incumbent Governor. He had run against him earlier and lost a very close race, which he would have won if he wasn't black.

Then in 1990 I worked for Feinstein when she ran against Pete Wilson and lost a close race. So you have two cases of moderate, milque-toasty Republicans who are succeeding and running pretty much to the middle. Neither of them was radical in any way. Wilson ran more to the right when he got ready to run for President, which really made him sort of a pariah in California for a

while, even among moderate Republicans who didn't like his antiimmigration. It's part of what turned the state more Democratic. The Republicans had a real opportunity to make headway with Hispanics, and I think Wilson set that effort back a long way with Prop [Proposition] 187.

So yes and no. California is a unique environment, but I was certainly learning, watching how the other side can build a coalition that can win a race against what I always thought were better candidates. Mine were always losing.

Nelson: When you were talking about the experience of being in a Catholic university, that's something that you and Bill Clinton had in common. I wonder—Is that something that was the basis for any sort of connection between you two? When you first started talking seriously with Clinton about becoming part of his campaign, I wonder if this is the sort of thing that came up as a product of a shared outlook or in some other way a common influence.

Myers: Not early on. I do remember talking to President Clinton about his experience at Georgetown and how much he liked it, how much he, too, enjoyed being around the Jesuits. I don't remember having a lot of long conversations about how that experience formed his political outlook. I think Clinton's was clearly more formed when he went to Georgetown than mine was when I went to Santa Clara. I was also Catholic and he wasn't.

Nelson: Right.

Myers: So for me, the Jesuit brand of Catholicism was *Wow, I didn't know there were Catholics like this.* Then I got out of Santa Clara and realized, *Oh, there actually really aren't except on the few Jesuit campuses around the world.* But yes, I think because Clinton is so congenitally what he is politically. What I mean by that is, he's absolutely in it, for all the people want to say about him, and some of it is true.

He likes being in the spotlight. He figures out how to win elections for the sake of winning elections. He really got in it and is in it to help people. I think that's evident. It's going to become more and more evident in his post-Presidential career too. There's a lot of things he could do. He's doing tsunami relief and teamed up with an unnatural ally, President [George H. W.] Bush—or maybe it's a natural ally because it's such a small club—because people are really hurting. There's a part of him that responds instinctively to people who are hurting.

That's why, I believe, he was successful. No matter what happened, no matter what he did. No matter what people said about him, there were a lot of people out there who believed that when push came to shove he was on their side and he would act in their interests. They didn't need to know any more than that. They could feel it. There was something about him. I very much respond to that instinctive level of—Whose side are you on? It's as simple as that. People are hurting, the playing field isn't level, and we're going to do what we can to change that. He didn't always go about it in the best way, but often he did. I think he made tremendous strides, but he always knew whose side he was on. I always admired that and still admire that about him.

Nelson: Was that your motive for getting into public life too?

Myers: Without a doubt. And that very much came out of the Jesuit experience for me, which really was, *This is not an option*. You can choose many avenues, but for me that avenue became politics. I was one of those kids who came out of college—I was going to change the world.

Nelson: I read your biographical material. I was looking for some journalistic experience and I didn't see it there, but I've heard about it today. You were editor of your school paper.

Myers: I was not the top editor; I was an editor. Yes, I wrote for the school paper. I was in Europe for a year, but I wrote for the paper the whole time I was there. I liked that. I considered being a journalist, but I soon came to realize I was too much of a partisan. Now you can be anything. You look at the world of the Internet—It's like go for it—but then I felt like I wanted to be on the field as opposed to writing about it.

Riley: Where did you go in Europe?

Myers: France. I spent a semester in Nantes and a semester in Paris.

Nelson: Being even on a college paper you probably got some sense of how news organizations operate that had some effect on your ability to serve as a press secretary, or am I wrong about that?

Myers: I was interested, as I'd mentioned. My parents always got the *LA Times* and I read it from a very early age. I was interested in it and followed more than just the Dodger scores, although I did follow that pretty closely. I liked being in the newsroom. We had a lot of fun down there. A lot of late nights and a lot of camaraderie that I liked and a sense of purpose that we were trying to expose truths and right wrongs and make sure people knew what was happening. I guess it wasn't a particularly political campus, but we were going to divest our student funds, damn it, from South Africa. That was the big movement at the time, which we successfully did. I can remember covering that, but also feeling strongly that that was the right thing to do. I realized that there were other people who probably were more inclined toward journalism. Several of my friends there did end up as journalists.

I liked journalists. At least until recently, to be a press secretary I think you had to like journalists. I had to be part of it. You didn't always have to tell them everything you knew, but I always thought to be any good at it you had to actually like and respect them and think that what they were doing was important. We found out that that's not necessarily true anymore, but I always thought that it was. I didn't expect I would *marry* a journalist, that's for sure, but I guess I proved I like them. [*laughter*]

I think journalism is going through a profound transition, driven mostly by technology and the speed with which information moves. I don't think we've figured out what journalism is anymore and what the role of it is. I think we're at a point where the next phase will be red newspapers and blue newspapers, red cable channels and blue cable channels, and you go to the place that reinforces rather than challenges your world view.

A hundred years ago there were 25 daily newspapers in New York and everybody went to the one—Maybe it will evolve into something else, but I think we're going to take sides. We're all going to retreat to our corners for the next chapter of this while we figure out who we can trust. I

don't think that's necessarily good news for institutions like the *New York Times,* but I could be wrong.

That's a long answer to your question, but I do think that I gravitated toward the newspaper in college because I was interested. I thought that was important, and it's not a coincidence then that I ended up as a press secretary and found that that was the place that I wanted to be in the campaign.

Freedman: I want to follow up on about a hundred different things that you've said already. Before we lose sight of Tom Bradley, I was really struck by your remembrance of him and your commenting on how you see him. You suggested that it has changed somewhat in retrospect.

Myers: I always knew he was important, but I was very young. As I've gotten older and look back on what shaped my world view and my experiences, my career, my personal life, he's an important figure. When Todd [Purdum] and I moved back to LA in '97 after we got married, Todd decided that it probably wasn't a good idea for the White House correspondent to be married to the former press secretary. They offered him the LA bureau, knowing I was from LA and it was a job he was interested in. So we moved back to LA. By then Tom Bradley had had a stroke and could no longer speak, but he had a tremendous group of loyal aides around him, many of whom were with him for almost all his mayoralty. They had a lunch bunch and would take him to lunch, and I'd occasionally go with them.

He loved it, because people would talk and he could follow everything. He'd laugh, and there was one guy, named Anton Scalia, who could understand what he was trying to say.

Riley: Anton [Antonin] Scalia?

Myers: Not Anton Scalia. Anton—His first name is Anton and he's Maltese; it's very close to that though [Calleia]. Yes, the Supreme Court justice used to fly out for lunch. [*laughter*] I don't think Tom Bradley would have had a lot of patience for Scalia, especially at that point in his life, but it was fun and it was nice. He died while I was there, and it was a nice chance for a lot of the people who worked for him to cross paths again.

Freedman: My question is not so much even about how you think of Bradley, but how you think of Clinton in light of how you described Bradley, in terms of not just his impact on your own formative development—obviously you weren't as young, but when you were describing Bradley—in terms of his story, his style, in terms of his dedication, in terms of what he brought politically and biographically. How does that compare with how you think, big ticket, about Bill Clinton now?

Myers: Clinton changed my life in some ways more than Tom Bradley. My life will never be the same, having had the opportunity to work for him and then to serve as White House press secretary. There's no going back from that, in a way. It creates all kinds of opportunities that you couldn't even have imagined.

I have a lot of affection for Clinton. He's the most talented person I've ever been around in terms of his ability to function on a lot of different levels and his huge range of interests. He's insatiably curious, a voracious reader. He has a near-photographic memory. He's an amazing

synthesizer of information. There was nothing you could talk about that Clinton didn't have some reference for and some information about. Whether it was college basketball or 15th-century philosophers, he had an opinion. He'd read this or seen that, or he'd talked to this guy—

He was obviously a quick study. I was constantly amazed not only by my own continuing ability to be wowed by him but I used to like to watch the effect he had on other people. I remember we were very early in Clinton's term, probably the spring of the first year. Foreign policy had not gotten off to a great start, but Clinton was getting ready to go on his first trip to Europe, so we were doing one of these briefings in the Cabinet room. There were a bunch of smart guys from the NSC [National Security Council], and I guess the State Department. They started to tell Clinton how it was going to be in Europe. He'd respond to them and say, Actually I think So-and-So's options are limited by this, that, and the other things that are happening to him domestically, and I really think he's either got to do this or that. Given the domestic pressure, I think he's going to do this, don't you? And these guys would be like—Oh! They never really quite thought of it that way.

Clinton was so tuned in to how the domestic pressures were affecting the range of options for these leaders. His instinct for it was remarkable. That was an experience that repeated itself over and over, where people thought they were going to go in and tell this young inexperienced guy how it was, only to walk out of there with their heads spinning a little bit. Wow. They were never expecting it. Clinton was always exceeding expectations in those early years.

I remember being at the mighty *New York Times.* We went in for an ed [editorial] board in April of '92, during the Democratic primary , and Clinton had won New Hampshire, then he went down south and won Georgia and Florida. Then he lost Connecticut to Paul Tsongas. It upended the campaign in a really weird way, because here was a guy on the track and all of a sudden this guy who couldn't possibly win the nomination beats him in Connecticut. Clinton was so mad. So we had this very tough campaign, and the only guy left standing was Jerry Brown, so Clinton finds himself campaigning against Jerry Brown. It wasn't going great.

We go to the *New York Times* and I'm not kidding, I thought that they expected him to walk in in overalls or something. By the end of this two-hour session, he had completely won the room.

Riley: Who was there from the *Times?*

Myers: Both [Arthur Ochs and Arthur Ochs, Jr.] Sulzbergers were there. There was only one other woman and myself. It was mostly editorial staff. I don't remember if Joe Lelyveld was there, but he must have been. I think he wasn't quite editor. I think Howell Raines was there. At the end of the lunch, there was only one other woman there and myself. The white-coated waiters go around with the box of cigars and they don't offer them to me or the other woman, but Clinton takes one and he looks at it and he says, "Great, thanks. I'm not going to smoke it now. I'll smoke it later, but I won't inhale." It was a great moment because it totally brought down the house. It was just days after the Marcia Kramer moment.

Nelson: On the other hand, were there times when you saw Clinton behave badly, immaturely, or inappropriately, when you thought, *I've been around Tom Bradley, and this is not how leaders of*

stature behave? Did Bradley set the standard for you for what a political leader ought to be and how he ought to conduct himself?

Myers: I don't remember consciously—The field was so much bigger with Clinton, and the physical and intellectual demands were greater. Things moved a lot faster. But I think that was there. I think that maybe that's why, when I look back at Tom Bradley—He wasn't a perfect guy, don't get me wrong, but he always handled himself with a certain amount—He wasn't a dynamic guy. He wasn't a guy who ever lit up a room. He had a nice way about him, but he could put a room to sleep as fast as [*snaps fingers*] with the best of them. He could be funny and charming, but he wasn't a very inspiring speaker. So there were contrasts between the two of them.

They both come from rough upbringings. Tom Bradley's parents were sharecroppers. He was born in Texas and they migrated to California. His dad left the family—same old story. Guidance counselors in high school tried to encourage him to take vocational classes, because they said he'd never go to college. He wouldn't listen to them.

Clinton was always going to college, that was clear, but there was very much a wrong-side-of-the-tracks upbringing, something that Clinton carried with him in the same way that Tom Bradley carried that with him, what it felt like to be from the wrong side of the tracks. I think I probably identified with that. I'd seen this before. I understood why I believed Clinton and Bradley were motivated by that. They never left those people behind.

Tom Bradley *had* to behave and set a higher standard for himself because he was black. There was no margin for error. In a way, Clinton pushed everything right to the edge. Bradley didn't have that option. He wouldn't have been mayor, let alone run for Governor and almost win, if he hadn't comported himself to a higher standard. That was both publicly, though Bradley did some stuff, but also personally. Tom Bradley's whole life was defined by "I cannot stray from the straight and narrow because if I do—" He also felt a very strong sense of obligation to be a role model for younger black men and women. He had a lot of black people around him. It wasn't a black city, so he had a real mixed team, but he was very interested in bringing up people around him. Bill Clinton had a lot more flexibility and took advantage of it.

Clinton had a temper. He didn't always behave. I'm trying to think of an example; I will as the hours roll on. I read somewhere recently that [James] Carville said that on most days he was pretty sure he was going to vote for him. [*laughter*] Something like that. I have to say, though, I'd never seen anything like Clinton in terms of the skills. After New Hampshire, I never believed we were going to lose. I was probably naïve, but I just thought, *How does the dynamic of this race change, unless Clinton changes it?* Every day that he didn't and Bush was unable to make him change it, it just was unclear to me how Bush was going to win.

Riley: We're tracking in that direction, but we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. Paul, was there something else you wanted to pose about Dee Dee's pre-Clinton period?

Freedman: I have some Clinton questions, so let's get there. I want to hear more about some of the early relations with other editorial boards and how you understood the evolving relationship with the press. But Russell, we can fill in.

Riley: If we can hold off on that just for a second—We're not wedded strictly to a chronology, but I think it does make sense to try to dispose of some of these earlier questions, unless there is something comparative that you really feel is pertinent at this point. I wanted to ask you a question about this. You said that you got into politics to help people, that you had this kind of passion for doing something for a cause. There were other kinds of cause politicians in the Democratic Party that you didn't have an affiliation with, people like Edward Kennedy or Gary Hart, or even later, Mario Cuomo. Were you ever inclined toward any of those three, or was it just a situation where the options weren't available?

Myers: Certainly that's true of Kennedy; I just never had an option. Kennedy didn't come across my world. If I'd been in Washington, I don't know. Gary Hart—I could have ended up just as easily working for Gary Hart as for Mondale. What I was trying to do was beat Ronald Reagan. It seemed to me at the time that Mondale was going to be the nominee, so I thought, *All right, if we've got a chance to beat President Reagan, this is the guy.* So that's how I ended up there.

Riley: Your cause politics is leavened by—

Myers: You can't do anything if you don't win, so I really thought the imperative was to have a not–Ronald Reagan President, because I thought that that was moving in the wrong direction. Then it's a combination of opportunities and inspiration. I went to work for Art Torres. He was in his 30s and was very dynamic. He seemed like the best, a guy who might be the first Latino Governor of a big state. Then his life went a little off track. He was still a good guy; he had some problems with drinking and some other stuff, which he eventually took care of.

But then I went to work for Bradley. I always thought Bradley was, despite what I knew about him—I had come to know him a little bit during the Mondale campaign—that he was working on the side of truth and justice. He was going to run for Governor and would have another shot at that. To think that there could be a black Governor of a big state like California was exciting.

Freedman: There's something about the campaign, the excitement of it, as opposed to working for somebody already in office or an organization.

Myers: Yes. I worked in the state legislature and in city hall and I found that a lot less interesting than the campaigns, without a doubt. As Mario Cuomo would say, "You campaign in poetry and you govern in prose." I was young. You're a little spoiled when your first campaign is a Presidential campaign. It's so big, especially when you're 22 or 23 years old, and it's that adrenaline rush of being around it that probably spoils you for getting the potholes filled, which is a lot of what you do at city hall.

One of my best friends at city hall was this woman named Wendy Greuel. She had all the hopeless causes. She did AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] and homelessness. She's now on the city council and she's probably going to run for mayor when Antonio [Villaraigosa] finishes his one term. I shouldn't say that because I don't have anything against him.

You asked about Mario Cuomo. I've always been something of a centrist—Tom Bradley, Dianne Feinstein, who I haven't really talked about. Dianne Feinstein was not the liberal candidate, but I think the second hardest job in America next to being President is probably being the mayor of

San Francisco. There is the left, the far left, and the radical left, and trying to do anything practical, even though there is this whole other swath of the city establishment that's not any of those things, right? So there's this constant clash. It's so loud and noisy, and crazy. It's a funny city.

I thought, *Gosh, if Dianne can survive that*—and she is really a moderate. She was pro–death penalty, which I am not. I thought about that a little bit, but I decided to go to work for her. I'll never forget seeing her. She was running against John Van de Kamp, who is a man I admired, but I didn't think that he could win and I didn't think that his brand of traditional Democratic constituency politics, which I felt was getting a little tired, even then—That was 1990—was the best way to win or to move forward. I thought we needed a more dynamic leader, and Dianne is quite dynamic.

We went to south-central Los Angeles to a black group. I can't remember what the group was, but she went in there and everyone said, "She can't win the Democratic primary. She's too conservative. She'll never win. You've got to win with blacks."

She went into this room and said, "I know that you're worried that I'm for the death penalty, but let me tell you why. The crimes that are being committed—the heinous crimes, the murders, the drive-by shootings—they're all happening in your neighborhoods. *You're* the people who are at risk. *You're* the victims of these crimes, and I don't think it's right." It may not have changed their position on the death penalty, but it changed their position on who they were going to be for in the Governor's race, and she won that pretty easily. Plus, she had been very courageous when Mayor [George] Moscone was shot, and she brought that city—Then that whole thing in Guyana—Jim Jones, the Jonestown temple thing—had all happened in a very short period of time on her watch. She really rose to the occasion.

I have a lot of respect—I'm close to Dianne. I admire her. It also was great working for a woman, and a Jewish woman. I thought, *Latinos, blacks, Jewish women*—I was always working for the person who wasn't—*which one of these is not like the others?*

I learned so much from Dianne. She was an exacting boss, but she's a good instinctive politician. She brought a lot of passion to it. She also had this funny way of going for details. She was always talking about crime, because when you're the mayor, you're down—I was familiar with that. That was what Tom Bradley cared about, too. People's lives, places where violence intersects with people's lives. She would talk about going into a convenience store moments after a shooting—I'm not making this up. There was brain material splattered on the canned goods. She was always talking about things like that. I remember thinking, *Well, people certainly remember.* Dianne had an interesting way of sprinkling in these graphic details. But we had a good time.

We had a very tumultuous first few months on that campaign. Dianne had hired a consultant who didn't work out, a guy named Clint Riley. He quit in the middle of the campaign and Dianne hired a guy named Bill Carrick and his partner, Hank Morris. They've run a lot of races and have become very good friends of mine. Carrick is an old Kennedy guy, more liberal than I am. But the friends that I've made along the way—You forge ahead. You don't always end up on the same side on these things. It really shapes how you view the world.

Nelson: I'm thinking that during the 1980s you might have had occasion to form opinions about Clinton before you met him, and his association with the Democratic Leadership Council. The fact that he almost ran in '88, the speech he gave nominating Dukakis. How did Clinton come onto your mental radar screen, and did you have opinions about him?

Myers: I met him very briefly very early on. I was working for Dukakis, and it was around the time of the California primary. Dukakis was supposed to come to LA for a big fund-raiser—$25,000 a couple or something—for the DNC [Democratic National Committee]. Kitty Dukakis did something to her neck, so the Governor decided to fly back to Massachusetts to be with her. I think it was the day before we had this big dinner, and no headliner, so, it was like, *Oh, God*.Everyone started calling everyone, and finally—I don't know quite how it happened—somebody found Bill Clinton, who was in Michigan. And yes, he was willing to come to LA. He had to go to Michigan for the day, so they got him a plane. It's Hollywood, right? Movie star. He said, "Just get me a ride. I've got to be back in Little Rock for something the next morning at eight o'clock, so I've got to take a red-eye. I need a plane and a clean shirt. I'm a 16-1/2-34." Whatever size he is. "OK, we can do that."

My friend Abby Springer was charged with getting the shirt, a white button-down, and she met him at the airport. Somehow, I guess because I was going to brief him, I met him briefly. I came into the hotel suite to tell him something that he needed to know. He was very young. You're kind of struck. I knew his bio. He was already somebody—and the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council] stuff. I can't remember if Tom Bradley flirted with the DLC or joined the DLC. I think he actually joined. But I think a lot of the people around him said, "That's the white male caucus. You can't possibly be for them." He said, "I'm a centrist."

But I remember Dick Gephardt and people like that coming through town. I think Mickey Kantor had a meeting at his firm that I went to. So I knew who Clinton was. Then he gave a speech that night, the one about driving around, the car tax speech, which was one of the speeches he used to give about how he got thrown out of office and how he came back and had to go back to those communities and campaign. He tells the story about some guy the people didn't want to vote for; they didn't like him. He said, "The one thing we know for sure is that guy is never going to raise the car tax again." It's a long shaggy-dog story. It blew the room away. Everybody is saying, "Why isn't this guy our nominee?" About a month later, he goes to the Democratic Convention and bombs.

Riley: Were you there?

Myers: I was. I was just like, "Shut up!" Everybody was saying, "Get this guy!" Five minutes turned into 30, 35 minutes. Who does that? Then he went on Johnny Carson and played his saxophone, and he was back in the game. So of course I remember all that. Mickey Kantor was friendly with him. Mickey had worked on legal aid stuff in Florida—I think in the '70s with Hillary [Clinton]. He was always a little bit in Clinton's orbit.

The next time I met him, there was some kind of conference—I don't think it was the DNC meeting—in LA, and Tom Harkin came. He was getting ready to run for President and Bill Clinton came. Mickey was there and he introduced me to Clinton. I think Mickey invited me to

the conference. He said, "You should come hear this guy," so I did, and I was really impressed with him.

His energy—I mean Harkin gave a great speech too, a much more traditional kind of stem-winding Democratic speech, a real populist speech, and I thought that was pretty good, but some of the things that Clinton said—He was talking about things like welfare reform, which I believed Democrats needed to talk to, and the components of welfare reform, like getting fathers to pay child support. I thought, *Where have we been on this? This is such an obvious Democratic issue; the people who are suffering are women and children. OK, this guy is willing to say things that Democrats haven't been willing to say.* I was immediately interested in him.

I then went to work for a guy named Frank Jordan, who was running for mayor of San Francisco. He'd been the police chief there and he was a friend of Dianne's, who had appointed him chief. He was running against a guy named Art Agnos, who was the incumbent mayor who had been very bad to Dianne during the Governor's race in '90. So it was a little bit of revenge on my part, which is never a good motive, but nonetheless I had agreed to go help in the last couple of months of this campaign. It was a little bit in disarray and I went up there. A day or two after I got there, I got a message slip from Mickey Kantor, who was friends with Art Agnos, the mayor.

Oh, God, I thought. *I don't need Mickey calling me up to yell at me for going to work for Frank Jordan.* So I waited two days before I called him back, which I normally never would have done. It would have been my first call, but I waited. I called him back and he says, "Who you with?" I said, "What do you mean? You called me at the Jordan for Mayor headquarters." [*laughter*] "I don't care about the mayor's race," he said. "Who are you with in the 1992 Presidential?" This was September of '91. I said, "I'm not with anyone." He says, "Good. Bill Clinton is getting ready to run. They're looking for a press secretary and I told them they should talk to you. Would you talk to them?" I said yes. So they came back to LA for something a couple of weeks later and I flew down and spent the afternoon with them.

Riley: "Them" being?

Myers: Bill and Hillary. It was the first time I met her. At that point she was a really hot property, a big Democratic figure. His wife is amazing. Not only is he interesting; he's got a great wife. I was hoping to spend a few minutes alone with him, which I never even got to do. I felt very comfortable with him and with her, but particularly with him. I knew that's who I would be working for.

I can't remember if Eli [Segal]—I swear to God, it's amazing I can have a conversation with you guys. Eli must have come to see me before I met with Clinton, but I'm not sure. I knew him, so I must have met him before I met with Clinton. He called me and said, "If you're offered the job as press secretary, will you take it?" and I said, "Yes, with one caveat. I told these guys I would do this race, and I don't feel like I can leave. The election is next week, but I think we're going to get in the runoff." "How long is that?" "That's four more weeks." He said, "OK." So he called me back and said, "We'll wait. Clinton would like to offer you the job." So it was great.

I was living in LA, but I'd come to San Francisco. The election was on Tuesday. I didn't even go back to LA. I packed all my stuff. Katherine Feinstein, Dianne's daughter, shipped what was

excess back down to my house in LA and I flew to Orlando on Friday, two days after that race was over, and got on the plane. I said I'd go home at Christmas and figure out what I'm going to do with my stuff.

Riley: Did you have an understanding with him at that time about your title and what your responsibilities would be?

Myers: Eli had worked that out. My title was press secretary. My responsibilities were whatever that entailed. I knew enough about campaigns to know these things morph so fast. But my expectation was that I would be the press secretary, the spokesman for the campaign, for as long as that was to be. I didn't know. This was in the wake of the 1987 Gary Hart thing. Clinton had a bit of a reputation at that time and he had already done the [Godfrey] Sperling breakfast where he'd said, "I've caused pain in my marriage." I assumed that that meant whatever was in the past was in the past and Hillary was OK with it. And if Gary Hart hadn't been caught contemporaneous with the campaign, it never would have been an issue in his campaign. It was an issue, but not really. It was a whispered thing. It wasn't really an issue because the general public didn't know about it.

Riley: Did you do some homework before you cast your lot?

Myers: I talked to Mickey. My plan was I was going to say something to Clinton about it, which I'm sure never would have happened, but I never got the chance.

Nelson: Because Hillary was there?

Myers: I don't think that was strategic. I didn't feel like it was the time. It just was the way it worked out, because they were traveling together. I met them at Mickey's house, because they were staying in Mickey's guesthouse, I think. I flew down, met them at Mickey's house, spent a couple of hours there, then drove to a fund-raiser at Harry Thomason's. I think I rode with him to the airport.

Nelson: And that was the audition?

Myers: Yes. It was pretty brief. But again, it was a crowded field. There were six people going to get in, or however many. Cuomo was still sitting on the sidelines. I was a Cuomo fan, but I certainly didn't think that he was the savior of the party.

Nelson: Why do you think Clinton hired you?

Myers: I have no idea. Not to be silly about it, but there weren't that many—You're running against an incumbent President; there are five or six candidates in the race; he's not the best known; and he certainly isn't considered the front-runner in most circles at that point; and the nomination isn't considered to be worth that much. It wasn't like the top talent in the party was lining up for these jobs. I was 30 years old. I had worked on Presidential campaigns, but not in a national capacity. I just think we always had a good personal connection and I was very at ease, but he's easy to be with. I always found him easy to be with.

I think it was partly Mickey's recommendation, and Mickey called. Even though he knew me, he called a mutual friend of ours, Linda Douglass, who was then the top TV political reporter in Los Angeles, and therefore in California, and an old friend, still a friend of Mickey's. She's now at ABC [American Broadcasting Company] here in Washington. He said, "Would this be a good idea? I want to recommend Dee Dee to the Clinton people," and she said absolutely. So I think in that little moment, they both claim credit for everything that's gone well in my life—none of the failures. But the two of them together still feel like they spawned me or something, which they did in many ways.

Riley: And you said that you had a kind of homework conversation with Mickey and he alleviated any concerns that you might have about—

Myers: My memory is not super clear on this, but my sense is that Mickey said something like, "I don't think that that's going to be a big deal, but we'll just have to wait and see." I felt that he was being straight with me. I think I also talked to Bruce Lindsey about it, because I knew Bruce a little bit—

Riley: Where does your connection with Bruce come from?

Myers: I sat next to him the night Clinton gave the speech at the fund-raiser. His wife was an advance person whom I knew and was somebody who was friends with a lot of my friends. So I knew Bruce. I felt like I knew him better than I actually did, but I definitely felt I had a connection with him. I don't think I had a profound conversation with Bruce, but I said, "Is this going to be OK?" and he said, "Yes, I think it's going to be OK."

Nelson: One more thing on this. In John Harris's new book, he quotes Carville, who was very high after the Pennsylvania—

Myers: That's where I read "On most days—"

Nelson: He quotes Carville as saying the interview he had with Clinton was a surprise to him, because instead of trying to convince Carville that he had the most money and a chance of winning, he talked about what he wanted to do.

Myers: You raise a very good point, because it was never about what do you think a press secretary's role should be—and tell me about the people you worked for. It was, "Dee Dee, we're going to change America." At the end of this, I was, "OK, yes sir, we're going to change America. We are. OK." I'm really glad you brought that up, because I still take that for granted. I don't even remember exactly what it was about, but it was not a job interview in the traditional sense. I don't know that I've ever had an interview like that with a politician. They usually leave that to somebody else. But Clinton's whole thing was we're going to change—We can do it.

Then to fast-forward to the last night of the campaign, 30 hours of flying all over the world. It was about two o'clock in the morning, and we were flying to New Mexico or somewhere and sitting there playing cards. All the political stuff from *Saturday Night Live* was running on the video screen and Clinton is talking on the phone. Finally I said to him, "Did you ever think you'd be here?" Because obviously we were going to win. He said, "Yes, I always felt—" He looked at me like, *You've been with me for more than a year. Why are you asking?*

Obviously there must have been times when he doubted. But at that point—Looking back on it, I thought, *That was a really idiotic question*, because one of the reasons I went to work for him was because he had a sense of here's what's wrong; here's what needs to be fixed; here's how we can fix it. This can be done. We can do it. We can change the world.

I've interviewed a lot of politicians, and they're never very focused. Most of them just want to get a feel for you. He knew where he was going, or at least he knew what he wanted to do. But you had a sense that he could see how this was possible. After looking at me like I had eight heads, he said, "I always believed it was possible. I always knew that the country was ready for change."

Freedman: Back to that initial meeting where Hillary was there. What are you getting from her? Is she communicating the same sense?

Myers: Yes. It was very much his vision, but she was clearly a key person in it. She shared it. It wasn't as if she worked for him. She was a partner in it. I certainly didn't think ahead. I saw her only as an asset in the beginning. I thought, *Yes, she can really communicate this stuff too. She believes it, she gets it, and she's been working on trying to make it happen.* By then I had done some homework about the Arkansas record and what they'd been able to accomplish, and I thought it was pretty impressive.

Freedman: So no red flags about her coming out of that?

Myers: Not for me. Not being from LA. Maybe if I'd been from Charlottesville I would have seen it differently, or Memphis. But no, I didn't see any red flags.

Riley: The death penalty situation wasn't a hang-up?

Myers: No. It was not my favorite thing, but by then I think I was probably convinced that a Democrat couldn't be anti–death penalty and win a national election.

Freedman: Did that ever come up? Did you ever have a substantive conversation with him about capital punishment?

Myers: Yes, later, but just over time. Flying around, we talked about everything. I told him that that was one place where I disagreed with him. These are just snippets of memory, but I don't remember him making a big philosophical thing about it. It's just, "Well, that's the way it has to be." I think it was a very practical decision as a politician from Arkansas.

I came to that race believing that I had a lot to learn about those parts of the country. I trusted his instinct, with the caveat that I would check these things out as time went on. But I trusted his instincts. I knew it was different to win in the South. I knew it was different to win there as a Democrat. You couldn't win a national election without the South. The Democrats weren't getting shut out in the South at that point.

We won the entire Mississippi River Valley, which I hadn't thought about until I went to the library opening. Clinton was walking through the library the night before—Bruce may have told you this—He looked at the map and he says, "That map is wrong. We won Montana." Of course

he was right, and they fixed the map before the opening the next day. One look at the map and he said, "We won Colorado, Montana, and New Mexico." Clinton certainly understood more about what it took to win those places than I did, and I knew that.

Nelson: One more question that comes out of your background. You grew up in a military family. I don't have the sense that too many people around Clinton had the experience of knowing what military culture was like, if I can use that term loosely.

Myers: Right.

Nelson: Then early in New Hampshire the draft issue comes up. I'm wondering—Did you have a perspective to bring? Did you get it in a way that perhaps others around Clinton who didn't know that culture and maybe thought avoiding the Vietnam war was what everybody did—Did you get it in a way that others didn't?

Myers: No, I didn't. There were people around Clinton who understood the way it was for people who got draft notices. I was a little kid. Given my father's experience—And he doesn't feel this way, I do—I think that the Vietnam experience, my own perspective on it—It was very hard on my dad, who remains a very conservative, pro-military Republican. It was very hard on him. Who knows where in the depths of his soul he comes to terms with all the things that were done in pursuit of political goals that were not only badly defined but poorly executed?

To me, being against the war was the right thing to do. I still wonder if Clinton hadn't just been honest about it, "Look, I didn't believe in the war. I thought the war was wrong for these reasons," which I think most Americans believe at least some part of, "and I decided that I would do everything I could within the law to not go." I don't know. How could that have been any worse than being a draft dodger? At least it would have been honest. I don't know if I was right about it.

I certainly wasn't giving Clinton advice on that level at that point. That was something way beyond my pay level, particularly at that point. But again, the people who really were troubled by it—people like James, who was in Clinton's age group and who knew what it meant to 19-year-old guys or 20-year-old guys to get a draft notice.

I also happened not to be there the day that that story broke. I'd gone home for my grandmother's 85th birthday. We happened to be in Milwaukee. My grandmother lived in Racine, which is about 30 miles south of Milwaukee. My parents were there. It had been long planned that we were going to stop in Milwaukee and I was going to get off for the weekend and fly back to Washington or wherever we were supposed to meet—maybe it was New York—on Sunday or Monday. The thing broke on the weekend, so I wasn't there when that whole story—

I'd been there for the earlier "Dear Colonel [Eugene] Holmes" letter. That was certainly devastating, but it was the drip, drip, drip of revelations. Then it was, how do you forget your draft number? His story kept coming up, needing to be edited. "Oh, you forgot to mention that"—What was as damaging as the actual information contained in the revelations was the fact of the revelations. How do you forget this stuff?

I do think when we got to the White House the day-to-day military culture was something that I was more familiar with than my colleagues. I was much more comfortable. That I understood. The draft and just how that would resonate, I didn't understand. But what it was like living around people who saluted more uniforms—Ironically, if you remember, General Barry McCaffrey had come to the White House early on. Somebody had said to him, "I don't talk to people in uniform," when he said hello. Somehow the *Washington Times* reported that it was me.

Nelson: They said that?

Myers: Yes, which was ridiculous, so I thought it was a great opportunity to fight back indignantly. In fact, Barry McCaffrey and I became quite good friends as a result, and his daughter interned in my office for a while.

Riley: Are you convinced that that incident actually happened, or was it apocryphal?

Myers: Barry says that it did. I haven't really spoken to him. We were pretty friendly, and then when he went to the Office of Drug Control Policy—but he says it did.

Nelson: Who said it to him?

Myers: A young woman that he didn't know. He didn't remember what kind of tag the person had on. It's not something you'd be looking for if you're just visiting the White House. He wasn't a regular then, as he became. But I thought it was ironic that somebody said it was me. Every young woman—I was it. Oh, yes, it must have been Myers. Whatever bad or good thing, it must have been me.

Nelson: Can we stay on this for just one more moment?

Riley: We'll need to dial back, but go ahead.

Nelson: On the drip, drip, drip—You said earlier that after New Hampshire you thought, *There's no way we're going to lose.* Did you still think that during this period? Did the drip, drip, drip give you pause about him as either a candidate or a potential President?

Myers: Did I think we were going to lose? No. I may have been naïve in my faith, but I believed that we would get through it. Did it give me pause? Yes. And what I learned was—Did I ever have a point where I thought, *Should this guy really be President?* I don't remember having that moment; perhaps I should have. I learned this slowly—I would have been better off if I learned it more quickly—but I learned that you had to listen very carefully to what he said. I made the same mistakes over and over, so it took me a long time. It was so unfamiliar to me: that we could debate the meaning of the word "is" kind of mentality—I had never come up against that before in my life.

Nelson: You went to a Jesuit school.

Myers: Yes. You'd think I would have been better prepared, but that was all in theory. When it came to actual events, there was the marvelous reverence of history, but also interpreting history.

So I don't know. It's a great point. But I was constantly surprised. I was surprised by it right up until the day Monica Lewinsky happened and Clinton said there is no sexual relationship.

I got calls from several reporters saying, "He's saying there's not one today, right?" And I said, "No, even *he* wouldn't do that." And they said, "No, that's exactly right. He's not saying there was *never*." I said, "Come on, even Clinton—You really think that's what he's saying?" They said, "Do you?" I was like, "Well?" Then all of a sudden I realized that's exactly what's going on. I know these kinds of complex theories. [*slaps hands together*]

Slowly I came to understand that. But let's not forget that at the same time that all this was happening, we were traveling around the country going places and going to events and we were watching Clinton work his magic. These were stories that were dominating the talk in the back of the plane; they weren't the stories that were dominating the conversations on the ground. And watching Democrats and in particular the Democratic primary respond to him, and watching him respond to them—that always balanced. There was much more to it than that.

This was a guy who had such tremendous talent. I believed and still believe that he had such a profound desire to do good, to make the world better. He had good ideas and more than enough energy for the task.

Riley: I want to get you to elaborate on this, but again I'm dialing back, because there are some bits and pieces of the story that I want to make sure that we cover. You said that you had packed your belongings and had gone on a plane to Florida. Can you give us a snapshot of what you discover when you get into this campaign that exists in a kind of nascent form that you metaphorically parachute into? What is it that you discover when you get there? Who are these actors? Is the campaign in great shape? What is your assessment when you first hit the ground?

Myers: That's a good question. I went to Florida because the Florida State Democratic Party was doing its straw poll. This is the weekend of December 14, 1991. It was a test for Clinton's strength in the South, so it was going to be a big deal. Bob Kerrey was going to be there and whoever else. Mario Cuomo was still wringing his hands.

So I got down there. I'm trying to remember who my contact person was. The person I remember spending the most time with was a guy named Jeff Eller. I don't remember if he was the state director in Florida or if he was just running the straw poll. He spent a lot of time in Florida; he was running the operation there. He'd been doing some stuff for Clinton and we just hit it off and were always pals. But I remember him walking me through what was going on in Florida and what his perceptions were. There were problems, but there were also strengths. We were going to win the straw poll, and we did. We were a mess, but not as bad of a mess as all the other campaigns, and I had been through enough campaigns to understand that. I knew I was parachuting into chaos. It wasn't as if I had come from IBM [International Business Machines]. I had come from Democratic politics, and that is a different animal even than Republican politics. So I expected to find chaos.

I think it was there that I met David Wilhelm, who was hired after I was, but was already there, I think, as the new national campaign manager. I don't remember if Mickey was there. I don't think so, but he might have been. He was definitely around Little Rock. I don't remember at

what point he moved down there. I knew George Stephanopoulos, and he must have come in with Clinton the next day. I think I got there Friday. I don't remember when Clinton—

Riley: George was traveling with the candidate at the time?

Myers: He was on and off the road, but I think at that point he was on. I was there a couple of days and then I went to Little Rock. There was a guy named Richard Mintz acting as press secretary who showed me around. They had just moved from the paint store to whatever that other building was that we did the first part of the campaign in. I can remember him touring me around and introducing me.

There were people that I knew that I kept running into. I don't know if Susan Brophy was there, but she was coming. I remember meeting Rahm Emanuel for the first time. He was sitting with his back to the door in his office and his feet up. Richard and I walked in. He said, "Rahm, I want you to meet the new press secretary, Dee Dee Myers," He says, "Hi." For 10 years Rahm has been a very close friend, from almost a month after that moment. But I thought, *Who is this guy?* I've reminded him of that episode many times.

So it was getting to know the characters. But I felt that I knew enough people. I had called several people in the intervening time to introduce myself. I called several reporters I knew who were covering the campaign just to say I'd be coming. I had an idea what their perspective was. Clinton was getting a little coverage. Between the time I was hired and the time I showed up, I think he did all the New Covenant speeches. I think he did them all in November and early December.

Riley: I'm almost positive that's correct.

Myers: So there had been conversations. I had had some expectations and knew some people. Then I got there and a guy named John Hart, who was a delegate tracker at that point, had moved into an apartment. He said, "Here's the building. Here's the place where I rented my furniture." So I just called them up, boom, boom, boom, and I met a woman there named Amy Zisook, who was working in the fund-raising office and was from Chicago. Turns out her family knew my mom's family in Chicago, so we ended up rooming together.

Riley: Some of the Chicago people—

Myers: Yes, Wilhelm brought them in. He brought in Amy. Within a couple of weeks, I stayed in Little Rock to get a sense of the campaign and to get those details taken care of.

Riley: Was the presumption that you were going to be traveling with the candidate most of the time?

Myers: The early presumption was that George and I would trade it off, and then it became clear that they wanted George to do stuff that required him to be on the ground more, especially as the year went on. I was on the road full time by March or April, maybe even earlier than that. I was on the road almost the whole time. In the beginning, George and I did trade off.

Freedman: When did he get there?

Myers: He was one of the first people hired. He was there before Clinton announced. That would have been October 3, so he must have come in September, maybe even August. That was probably the first call I made after I talked to everybody, or maybe after Eli called me.

Riley: Had you known George—

Myers: From Dukakis.

Riley: —very well?

Myers: Fairly well, yes. I was in Boston enough to know him. He was on the road a little bit. I remember seeing him at debates. He was an opposition research guy, and I would talk to him in California. He'd call me pretty regularly and say, "OK, we found this out," or "We need to work on this today—" however his job evolved. He was very well thought of, and his little Greek Mafia. There was Nick Mitropoulos, Governor Dukakis, and George Stephanopoulos. George was considered a talented guy who would be a figure in future campaigns.

Nelson: By fall of '91, Clinton had gotten—I'm doing this from memory now—Robert Farmer to be his national finance chair, and that prompted a number of stories that this is evidence that Clinton is the front-runner. He was looking awfully good at that point.

Myers: There were two strains of wisdom about it. He's putting together an organization; he's raising money. He's a very impressive guy; he's too conservative to win a Democratic primary. So there were two strains operating at the same time, depending on which part of the elephant people were touching, as to whether they thought that he could win. Conventional wisdom in a lot of Democratic circles was that you had to run left to win the primaries, and then you would run back to the middle. That's why Cuomo was considered a shoo-in in a Democratic primary and that the traditional Democratic constituencies would line up behind him.

George and I have long debated whether Clinton could have won if Cuomo got in. He says no way, and I say maybe the stuff about Clinton wouldn't have surfaced in quite the same way. Clinton had a big bull's-eye on his head pretty early as a result of the media recognizing him as talented, extremely ambitious, organized, recruiting talented people. So there began to be both a love affair with him and additional scrutiny—of course especially when that love affair bumped up against unpleasant facts. There's nothing quite like a broken heart to fire people up.

Just one more point on the fund-raising: By December 31, I can remember watching Rahm Emanuel standing on top of his desk screaming at people on the phone because our goal was to get the $3 million by the end of the year, and Rahm did it. He raised $3 million, and that was a big deal. Bush raised a hundred-and-something million dollars, with an uncontested primary in the last cycle. We got $3 million at the end of the one year out. We're a month from New Hampshire and we've raised $3 million. I don't remember what we had on hand. But nonetheless, that was a figure big enough to put Clinton at the top of the heap.

Nelson: Although Farmer was the big name, it was Rahm Emanuel who really did the work.

Myers: Rahm was the one standing on his desk screaming at people on the phone, but Bob did bring a lot of credibility. He brought a lot of people into the network, but so did Rahm. Rahm

was the day-to-day person; Farmer was the chairman, so he definitely had a big role. But Rahm was the day-to-day person counting the money as it came in. Then he and Amy [Rule] went to Washington after the primaries and ran finance from there.

[BREAK]

Riley: We were getting into the very early stages of the campaign. We tracked ahead a bit and began talking about the troubles that erupted in New Hampshire. Is there anything in particular you can remember about the Clintons' relationship with the press or their attitudes toward the press, in advance of the explosion that occurred in New Hampshire?

One of the things that we'd like to be able to figure out is, ultimately there seems to be this great antagonism. Was it always there? If it wasn't there, where was the turning point, and was it at some stage remediable? On top of that is the related question about whether the candidate himself or Mrs. Clinton were always on a parallel track with respect to their views on the press, or was one or the other taking a more advanced point of opposition?

Myers: Those are all good questions. I don't remember there being a lot of antipathy toward the press prior to New Hampshire. We were at a point where we didn't have a lot of reporters traveling with us. We traveled on small planes. Occasionally there would be one or two reporters. It was much less adversarial by definition, just because of the way the campaign was at a period where Clinton was getting mostly favorable notices. There weren't people breathing down his neck 24/7.

I don't remember in that context if I talked to Clinton about his overall views of the press. I made assumptions—maybe they were wrong—based on my observations of him, that he's pretty comfortable with reporters and pretty good at it. Early on in a campaign you still have a chance to talk about ideas. That all changes. It seems backward that you could talk about them early and not later, when people tune in, but that is in fact the way it works. There were people hanging around him who were groupies—not groupies—but the Joe Kleins of the world, who really were very interested in Clinton and his ideas. Don Baer ended up working for Clinton, and then there were the Arkansans. That was a little different breed.

In his relationships with the national press, which of course I thought was much more important, there didn't seem to be those antagonisms. And yet, in his relationship with the local Arkansas press, it was clear that this was complicated. A lot of that I chalked up to Arkansas, Little Rock, small places where people have long memories. Once you start, you live in the South; everybody is connected to everybody else through generations of relationships and families. I always find it interesting—*Oh, so that's how that person came to know that person.* Then there was Betsey Wright. I don't remember when she came. Do you? She had been there and then she came back. Betsey's job was dealing with Arkansas—That's how I viewed it at that point—all the things that had gone on in Clinton's life before he was a candidate for President, what he had done as Governor, what his accomplishments were, who the people were who needed to be taken care of. Since I wasn't in Arkansas that much and didn't work that closely with her, I don't know what she did every day. It had a lot of ripples, I'll say that. So there was this other part to the story, but it was of less concern to me, and frankly of less interest to me.

Riley: At that point there was no interrelationship between the two. The Arkansas question was pretty much on a shelf by itself, and then the national media was—

Myers: And the national media would come down because his record was relevant. I believe that that would certainly be an issue in the campaign, but not the dominant one. The Massachusetts miracle was a good example of the way it can turn on you, so it wasn't completely insensitive to the possibilities of how it can come of back around to bite you. But Clinton had a lot better handle on how to make his story part of a broader national story. He was just much better at it.

But anyway, New Hampshire all of a sudden—Iowa was not a contest because Harkin was in the race, so it didn't really matter. Not only was New Hampshire the first real contest in the race, it became incredibly more heated and important because of everything that happened. I remember the day of the "Dear Colonel Holmes" letter. I think it was midnight when I saw it for the first time. It was very late. James and George, and Clinton was in and out. Was Mark Gearan there? I can't remember. What are we going to do about this? James ended up having that weird thing in the airport hangar the next day, which was just a complete goat rope. He was in a swarm of reporters. He tried to explain what the letter was or answer questions about it. It got out of control very fast.

Riley: James thought that that letter—

Myers: Helped.

Riley: You didn't feel that way.

Myers: I wasn't sure. I wanted to believe James, but somehow it didn't strike me as exactly helpful. It was hard to explain. I guess I was responding to questions that I was getting, maybe not that night, because no one knew about it yet, but Mark Halperin knew about it. That's how we got it. So Mark Halperin was a good barometer for how the press was going to react. He was always a little bit on the point, always the first one asking the questions maybe not everybody else would have asked. But it generated a lot of questions. For me, that's never a good thing.

When you can't give a simple answer to something that ends the questions, then you know it's going to be a story. Once the story is living and going about its own life, you don't know where it's going to go. I guess that was my feeling about it. *I* didn't know where it was going to go. Anyway, James went out with the letter and then the whole *Nightline* strategy. I don't remember when that was hatched, whether it was that night or the next day, because there was a rolling meeting in this room around this little table in that horrid Day's Inn, which was like the ninth ring of hell or something. That place was bad.

Then it was just watching. I remember, of course, watching *Nightline* and Ted Koppel reading that letter, the whole thing, and Clinton doing well. I remember thinking, *OK, I think he stopped the bleeding here. He's responded to the questions.* Then it was just a question of can you hold on. I remember flying around exhausted. One of my clearest memories of New Hampshire, maybe this is where I decided Clinton would win. I'd worked for so many losing politicians. With every single one of them, there was a moment when you looked in their eyes and you knew they knew it was over. Every single one of them. I kept looking for it in Clinton and I couldn't see it. He never gave up, not for a second. There was never a moment he gave up the ghost.

I thought, *OK, if he's willing to fight, I'm willing to fight. I don't know where this is going to go, but I never saw anyone dig so deep.* I thought it was remarkable. Then of course, in the midst of that, when Clinton has his back up against the wall, he gives the "last dog dies" speech, which to me is the greatest political speech I think I'll ever hear because the circumstances were so extraordinary. I think it was an American Legion Hall or some horrid little place with a low ceiling. It was really dark and it was hard to see.

This crowd was like, "We're going to see this guy before he dies," because no one really believed that he was going to be able to survive. They walked out of there and they were for him. I thought, *He turned this room around.* They were for him a week ago, they weren't with him that night, and then they were with him by the end of the speech. But it was so quiet in there. It was so extraordinary.

I was standing next to Joe Klein, and at one point he looked at me and I looked at him and we knew we were looking at something very unusual. It was that experience, seeing how much he wanted it. Everybody did their part, but none of it would have mattered if it wasn't for him. That was where Clinton pulled his own chestnuts out of the fire. I thought, *He almost single-handedly willed this thing to survive.* How do you capsize a guy like that? It's hard. That's why I didn't believe that he would resign when Monica happened.

I thought that was not in his nature. There's no mechanism for getting him out short of impeachment, which would take at least a year. You can send all the leadership in Congress you want. Down at the White House, Clinton is going to have them walking on the South Lawn endorsing him by the end of the meeting. They never came, because they knew. Right? It was not going to happen, and he survived.

Riley: You'll have to refresh my memory. Maybe the three of you can help. Gennifer Flowers hits before the draft thing?

Myers: I can't remember which tabloid it was—They all morph into one—five women that Clinton had allegedly had relationships with. Every Wednesday these tabloids would come out, so it was like every Tuesday we'd say, "OK, what's coming tomorrow?" I think the next week or two weeks later—Gennifer Flowers had been one of the five. Then it was the story about her and the tapes and all that. That was the first thing.

It was revealed that there were holes in her story. I was one of the people who would point out the flaws in her tale. She said their first rendezvous happened at the Excelsior Hotel before the Excelsior Hotel was built. She said she was with him in Dallas a weekend when his official record showed he was not in Dallas. Thousands of people saw him someplace else. There was a series of things that were mistaken in that story, although clearly in hindsight a lot of it was also true. I don't know what.

Then, of course, the *60 Minutes* thing had happened on Super Bowl Sunday. That was pretty extraordinary, too, because we went through a whole Saturday of "What are we going to do?"

Riley: You were involved in those discussions. Can you characterize for us what was on the table?

Myers: We wanted to do something that weekend to send Clinton out, get it over with, get it done by the end of the weekend. Gene Randall of CNN [Cable News Network] had a show; I guess it was on Saturday. It was public affairs, a political show. It was a half-hour or an hour interview show, so for a lot of the day—This must have been Friday—we were talking about doing that on Saturday. The conversation was, well, we could do this, we could do that. We have an offer from CNN. Let's do Gene Randall's show, and then the offer from *60 Minutes* came in, and I had to call Gene and tell him we weren't going to do his show. Boy, was he mad! But the *60 Minutes* offer was we'll do it live to tape. It will be 18 minutes, or whatever it was, and they get to say their side of the story. It would be a tape setup piece, I think.

I didn't go. James and George and I guess Paul [Begala], Mrs. Clinton, the President—then Governor—went to Boston on the way to New Hampshire for a campaign stop. The *60 Minutes* thing happened, and then of course Don Hewett didn't keep his word, in the view of the Clintons, which I'm sure contributed to the distrust. It didn't end up being live to tape. It ended up being heavily edited, and they weren't particularly happy with how it was edited. The initial reaction to it was uncertain: There it is, now let's wait and see how the world reacts. It wasn't entirely clear whether this would put it to rest or not. It didn't entirely, but it did as much, I think in hindsight, as we could have hoped in terms of stabilizing that.

Riley: It wasn't a given that they would do this, was it? I mean, there was discussion—

Myers: There was a long discussion about whether they should do something. I think there was quickly consensus, although I'm not sure how. It didn't include Hillary in the beginning.

Riley: That was part of my question.

Myers: The original thing was to send Clinton out, and then the *60 Minutes* offer was for the two of them. I think it was nonnegotiable from *60 Minutes.* I think it was perceived as risky, but potentially more effective if it went well.

Nelson: How many cameras?

Myers: I don't remember and I wasn't there. That was when the lights fell on him and Hillary almost got conked by the falling—It was really quite scary, but I didn't see it. I was watching it that night, before or after the Super Bowl, depending on which coast you were on. The feeling was *OK, there it is*.

Freedman: But the feeling was not, *Phew*. You were uncertain afterward.

Myers: I thought it went pretty well, but people were being introduced to them for the first time and this is the first thing that they learn about them, that they've got some funky thing going on in their past. So there wasn't a lot of precedent for it. The interview went pretty well.

Then there was the Tammy Wynette *Stand by Your Man* thing. It was unclear. She showed a flash of that side of her that I didn't really know. I'd only been there four or five weeks at that point, and I hadn't spent very much time with Mrs. Clinton. I didn't spend as much time with her. She was around—Obviously she came and went in the campaign. I certainly did not know her, so I guess that was my first moment of thinking that she's a little bit more complicated. I

thought she was mostly still good, but this Tammy Wynette *Stand by Your Man* side of her personality—I don't know.

Riley: Do you remember your reaction when the tapes came out?

Freedman: Flowers?

Riley: Yes, the Gennifer Flowers tapes. You've got your candidate's voice recorded talking with this woman. That was probably unexpected, I would guess?

Myers: Yes, it was weird. Why is she taping him? Why is he talking to her on the phone? But they were pretty benign. You jump on it. We all believe what we want to believe. There's one point where she answers the phone, "Hello." He goes, "Hi, Gennifer, it's Bill Clinton." Now, if you're having a 12-year relationship with somebody—I don't call my husband and say, "Hi, honey, it's Dee Dee Myers." So I thought, *What's that?* And the conversations were not especially familiar. The people obviously knew each other, but they weren't like coochie coo. There were no code words. Maybe Clinton didn't know he was being taped. So if he doesn't know if he's being taped, why does he pick up the phone and say, "Hi, Gennifer, it's Bill Clinton." "It's me," "it's Bill," "it's"—whatever.

Freedman: "Honey bear."

Myers: Exactly, "Pookie." Twelve years, you'd think something. Then there were the mistakes in her story. So I thought, *I don't know what it was, but there's something off about it. It's not what she says it is.*

Freedman: Did you ask ever?

Myers: He answered without my having to ask, "Her story's not true" kind of stuff. I didn't say, "Well, did you ever?" James claimed—I can't remember the story—I'm sure you guys have asked James about it—

Riley: We haven't talked with James.

Myers: Oh, you haven't talked with James yet. I can't remember whether he asked Clinton or whether Clinton basically said nothing happened. You have to check that with him. My belief was that they'd obviously had some friendly relationship, but it was not what she claimed it was. The fact that she had taken money to tell her story also suggested to me that she might be willing to embellish her story to collect what was a lot of money—$150,000.

Then, of course, there was the press conference, which happened I guess in January, when we were flying down to hit southern capitals as a show of strength. All these Governors were for us, so we went to Jackson, then to Baton Rouge. Ed [Edwin] Edwards was there and he said, "What's this story?" It was a horrible day. As we arrived, we got out of the plane and there were all the screams. TVs weren't as ubiquitous as they are now, but there she was, in the red thing with the roots. It was, *Oh, my God*. Ed Edwards says, "That girl—They paid her for her story?" Clinton said yes. "How much did they pay her?" He said, "I don't know. It's reported $150,000." "If they paid all my girls $150,000, they'd be broke." It was the first time I'd seen Clinton laugh

in a couple of days. Clinton just cracked up. Ed Edwards is in jail or something, isn't he? I don't know.

Nelson: Yes, he is.

Myers: Anyway, then we went to Austin and met with Governor Ann Richards. We went to the state house. I don't think Clinton gave a speech, but it was interesting. It was very good for Clinton to be home, too. He was in the South; he was around people who knew him and were still going to be for him. Nobody blinked. Nobody was scooting away. They all said, "Don't worry; we're still for you." I guess Ray Mabus was the Governor of Mississippi at the time. So Mabus, Edwards, and Ann Richards. It was a place where Clinton was going to show some strength, so that was helpful. I can't say the story went away, because it kept perking along—

Riley: But what you've already testified to was that by his reaction to it, he managed to wrest New Hampshire—

Myers: Right. All that—It was clear he was going to fight through it. I don't know whether he expected it. No, there's no way. One of the things that I believe about candidates for President is that no matter how much they've been around it, no matter how much they've observed it, no matter how much they want it—In Clinton's case, he, more than any others, all those things. He observed it, he was around it, he wanted it—they're never ready for what it feels like when that tsunami comes crashing on top of you. There's no way to be prepared for it. There's nothing like it that you've ever experienced. Until you've gone through it, you have no idea.

So he was learning. He said things also—Ace [Smith] what's his name, his dad was the DA [district attorney] of San Francisco—"Ace, what am I going to be like when I'm 80?" He was an opposition research expert and he'd gone through Clinton's record and looked at things and he had raised some questions about Clinton's record on the draft and Clinton said, "I've been through 17 campaigns in 17 years in a state where there was a newspaper war on. There's nothing new to say about the draft." It sounded pretty plausible to me, but you think you've seen a fast ball in the minor leagues and then all of a sudden you're looking at 95 across the plate and it's a whole different animal.

Anyway, there was another chapter to be written about the draft story. So I think in a way Clinton answered those questions, saying, "We've looked at this. We've done everything we can. There's nothing there on any of these stories." They kept being there. But Clinton was very determined to do what it took to stay on his feet. More than anything, I took my lead from that. As long as he was willing to stay on his feet, he was going to stay on his feet. At some point you think, *What's going to* take *him down? He's not going to get* knocked *down.* It was pretty clear—What Democrat was going to beat him in the primary?

Then Ross Perot complicated things. Ross Perot got out and the Bushes were going to disrupt his daughter's wedding. Then he got back in. OK, 19 percent of America still voted for him. That's the most amazing thing. But they were people—You can debate that one until the cows come home; I think Clinton still would have won even if Perot wasn't in the race. The Bush people disagree, but the polling bears it out, and the mood of the country. People would have stayed home if they didn't—A lot of those people who hated Clinton just wanted to vote for the guy

who's going to get under the hood. And if the guy who was going to get under the hood wasn't in the race, I think a lot of them wouldn't have voted.

Nelson: I have a couple of questions. One is kind of a free-association question regarding Bruce Lindsey through all this. You mentioned that Betsey Wright was handling Arkansas, but Bruce was the other big long-standing presence with Clinton in Arkansas. Where is he through this whole process?

Myers: At Clinton's elbow every day, every step of the way. Bruce was the most ubiquitous. He was the constant. He wasn't always the person making the decision about what to do, although he always participated in the conversations. I thought Bruce was pretty good at calibrating his areas of expertise, and when he would weigh in and when he wouldn't, but he always was a very good barometer of Clinton's mood, what Clinton was thinking, and how Clinton was feeling, and knew all that Arkansas stuff too. Bruce was a pretty steady presence. He was always on the plane. I'm sure there were one or two trips when he wasn't there, but they were very few and far between. I'm sure he was in that room, for example, the night the "Dear Colonel Holmes" letter broke, that Mark gave it to George, that Bruce would have been in there. He's the keeper of the memory in a lot of ways. Have you guys talked to him yet?

Riley: No. He said he'd talk to us after President Clinton does.

Myers: Really?

Riley: Bruce is on our advisory committee and has been instrumental in the progress we've made.

Myers: That's right. He's in the Library Association.

Riley: But I will say that his role, among many that we look at from the outside, is probably the most opaque.

Nelson: What function do you think he performed for Clinton? It's not as though he's just a stable pony, just some comforting presence.

Myers: Oh, no.

Nelson: He's as smart as a whip.

Myers: Oh, yes.

Nelson: I don't know of any other candidate who has had that kind of constant presence at his side.

Myers: That's a good point, actually. Not at the Presidential level anyway, right? What did Bruce do? I guess he served a lot of different functions. I'll go through some of them. Wendy Smith was the trip director for much of the campaign, but he functioned as an *uber*trip director. Did Clinton have his schedule? Did he have his speech? Was he comfortable with the content of his speech? Was there something in there that was upsetting him? Was there something he

thought should be added? If Clinton didn't talk directly to the speechwriters, Bruce could communicate that. Or if Clinton was uncomfortable about something he couldn't even quite put his finger on, Bruce would pick up on it: if there were too many events on his schedule, if he was not getting enough rest, if he was upset because some politician he expected to see wasn't at the airport.

Bruce understood the things that were important to him, so he'd look at things and say, "The Governor lands in Jackson and Governor Mabus isn't on the schedule. Where is he? Has he been called? Are we sure? Let's call him again and make sure." Because if we land and Mabus isn't there, and it turns out nobody called Mabus, Clinton's going to lose it. So there was that kind of understanding the candidate, making sure that things were done that other people who didn't know him as well might not see. Bruce had a lot of common sense. He was a good barometer of what would work and what didn't work—good political instincts. He didn't try to be James, but he was on the phone all the time with people and trying to keep on top of all that.

Mostly he was the in-and-out guy. He was another channel for making sure that Clinton was getting what he thought he needed. There were a lot of people who thought there were too many kids on the plane, and Bruce was the grown-up. Bruce mostly did behave like a grown-up. He was a steady guy—never got too high, never got too low—which was a good thing for Clinton, also.

Riley: Clinton's more volatile—

Myers: Yes. "Bruce, are you cracking up there, Bruce?" He's got a great sense of humor. He doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve exactly, but he was helpful to the rest of us, too, as somebody you could go to for advice or help. I always would keep him up to date. He was interested in what the press was saying. There were things coming up over and over that came to be a problem. "We've got this thing going on. They're talking about this. I don't know where it's going." He'd take it in, and if he thought he needed to let Clinton know, he would. Sometimes he'd say, "You'd better tell him that." Stuff like that.

Or if I'm having trouble getting this on the schedule because Little Rock won't let me put it on the schedule, can you help me with that? He'd say yes or no. His follow-through was very good, too. Everybody felt good having him there because he was somebody who could really help make sure that everyone was aware of what was happening with the candidate. It's so hard to be the candidate; it's such an isolating experience. A lot of candidates have their wives—Bruce didn't exactly serve all the functions of a wife, but he was a companion and a peer. Very quickly when you're running for President, you don't have a lot of peers. You're the guy and there isn't anybody else. Bruce more than anybody else was able to continue in that relationship.

Riley: Could he tell the President no?

Myers: Oh, yes.

Riley: Or tell the candidate no at this stage?

Nelson: For example—

Myers: I can't think of a specific one, but if Clinton wanted to add a stop, Bruce would say, "No. You're exhausted, plus we'll be late for the next thing, and you've got this and you can't do it. No." He was the only one on the plane who could do that. "Let's stop at this hamburger stand. There's a crowd." Bruce would say, "We're already an hour and a half late. Get back in the car." Stuff like that. The rest of us didn't have quite enough heft to make those calls.

Nelson: When Hillary Clinton is around, how does that affect the dynamic between Bruce and—

Myers: It didn't change it that much. It changes it a little, obviously, but I think Hillary trusted Bruce too. I'm trying to think how that worked. There's a more intimate person on the plane then, all of a sudden. Bruce is no longer the person with the most intimate relationship with the candidate, so that obviously changes it. But he was respectful of that. I never witnessed any tension in that regard, like "Get out of here. This is my job. You're getting in my way." He must have felt it at times, but he didn't let on. Then you have somebody else talking in Clinton's ear. Clinton was susceptible to that. He heard a lot of voices all the time.

Nelson: Sounds like Bruce almost never made a false move or understood a situation incorrectly.

Myers: I'm sure that's not true.

Nelson: In general.

Myers: He got it much more right than wrong, in my opinion, in the campaign, and the White House became more complicated. We'll get to some of that. A lot of it happened long after I was gone. I'm sure there are people you've talked to who didn't have a cordial relationship with him, but I think most people did. He kept his own counsel, but he wasn't back tailing on people. He might not agree with you, or might not do your bidding for you, but you always had a fair hearing from him. I always felt that he was fair. He was good to me.

Nelson: To bring it back to Gennifer Flowers, and when you hear these tapes. You're all wondering to some extent, *What really happened here?* Right? Does anybody go to Bruce and say, "I need to know what really happened"? Or would you rather not know, just want to deal with the situation? Or you want to know, but you wouldn't ask him because—

Myers: Somebody may have gone to him and asked that. I wouldn't have, because if Bruce knew, he certainly wasn't going to tell me. That's why he's Bruce. You might have gone to him and said, "This is really upsetting to me." I didn't, but somebody might have. He would have had a conversation about it. He wouldn't have answered the yes or no questions, and I don't know if he knew. I have no idea what he knows. That's again why he's Bruce. You guys said he's one of the most opaque figures around Clinton. He was, and he was intentionally so, and it's one of the reasons that he's been an object of great suspicion on the right. They think he's Doctor Evil.

Riley: From the perspective of the people who don't make that interpretation, it's a question of there being a unique presence—

Myers: But here's the other thing about Bruce, though. He didn't make himself a big presence. You know what I mean? He didn't throw his weight around. He only weighs 140 pounds

anyway, soaking wet, but that wasn't his way. Other people might be muscling you out of the way, reminding you how no one talks to the guy except through him. He was never like that.

Riley: And all of that is extremely important for us to understand, because it seems to be a relationship that in this particular instance worked extraordinarily well for this President. For scholars on the outside, the question is, if it worked well for him, is there a place for something like this? Might you expect to see something like this around other Presidents?

Myers: I think it's so specific to the individual personalities of these two men that I don't think you can try to re-create it. Obviously there's a profound bond of trust between them. What's their friendship like? Will Clinton be at Sarah's wedding this summer? Yes, without a doubt. How much does he know about Bruce's life beyond? I don't know. What do they talk about when they're alone together? I've played hundreds of rounds of hearts with the two of them. It was always about the hearts.

As I've often said, I wish I had had a son before I ever dated, because men have an unbelievable ability to just be doing whatever is in front of them and there's nothing else going on and that's perfectly acceptable, which I'm learning from watching my little boy.

Riley: He's how old now?

Myers: Two. But I can already see it in him. And that was it; they were playing cards and that was great.

Riley: But you played hearts with them?

Myers: I played. I was there to lose. That was my job and I did it extremely well, I'll have you know.

Riley: Who was the fourth?

Myers: We usually played three-handed. It depends if we were on Air Force One, but I would always play on Marine One. We would always see how many hands we could get in on the short flight from the White House to Andrews or back. Once we got three hands in, which is pretty good. So it was always Bruce and Clinton and I, for whatever reason, on that particular flight. Then on the plane, a lot of other people would play, but I played a lot and I never got any better.

Riley: Did you focus on it, or was it just something to kill time for you?

Myers: I didn't really care. You're playing against Bill Clinton, so your odds of ever winning are not very good. He would try. He'd say, "Now why you'd do that?" I'd say, "I don't know. It seemed like the right thing." It's not my thing. I don't really care about cards.

Riley: But he'd get lost in this game?

Myers: Oh, yes.

Riley: Not lost—

Myers: A lot of times that was all he'd be doing. A lot of times he'd be doing five other things, flipping through his briefing book. Then he'd say, "Now, Bruce, why'd you just play that spade?" He wasn't even watching. I was watching and I didn't know Bruce played a spade. He'd be on the phone, having lunch. It was the remarkable thing about him. He could do so many things at once.

When he was first President, we were in Chillicothe, Ohio. I remember it so clearly because I think it was the first trip that he'd taken as President. We were staying at this little hotel, which is all they have in Chillicothe, and he was sitting there at the end of the day making thank-you phone calls to people who had helped him on the campaign. He was eating dinner, playing cards, and watching a movie, *American Me.*

Riley: Crossword puzzle?

Myers: Maybe, but he had five things going. All I could do was still lose at hearts. [*laughter*] It's pretty amazing. A friend of mine had made the movie, so I was really focused on whether he was watching the movie. He was following it.

Nelson: *American Me*?

Myers: Yes. It was a small movie starring Edward James Olmos. It was about a San Quentin prison guy.

Riley: But these guys, they would concentrate on the game?

Myers: Yes, but they could do that and do a hundred other things. But Clinton did play for real. It's a very strategic game. You have to remember the cards and the cards your opponents are playing. Every now and then, though, I'd surprise him and shoot the moon or something, and it was great. Clinton didn't like to lose. The first couple of times I did it, I would take a victory lap down the plane, and he didn't think that was so amusing, so I stopped with the victory laps. [*laughter*] I'd lost like 150 consecutive hands and now I'm going to take a victory lap. It didn't go over so well.

Riley: Did he take a mulligan at cards?

Myers: No. I don't know how you would.

Riley: Did he cheat at cards?

Myers: I don't think so.

Riley: I don't know how you would.

Myers: I don't know how you would either, and even though I played all the time, I probably wouldn't know if he was cheating right under my nose. I did play golf with him.

Riley: Did you? Tell us about that.

Myers: It was a lot of fun. It was Erskine, the President, and me, and we played either at Congressional or Army-Navy.

Riley: This was when you were still press secretary?

Myers: No, it was after I left. I'm a much better golfer than I am a hearts player, but you've got to play a lot to be any good at golf, and I haven't played that much in recent years. He coached me on every shot, which I didn't mind. I found it fun. How often do you get coached by the President of the United States? He's nodding, "That wasn't a bad shot." But there were balls going all over the place. I didn't know which one was mine, which one was his. But Erskine is an excellent golfer. He has a bad back, so he never even took a single practice swing. He'd just walk up to the tee—swish, 250 yards straight down the middle—and pick up his tee. Erskine would have played the whole round in an hour and a half. It took Clinton and me four hours. But it was fun.

Riley: We've asked about Bruce. This was your first exposure, I guess, to James Carville, coming into this campaign.

Myers: Never met him and had only read about him from the [Harris] Wofford campaign.

Riley: What are you finding out about this unusual character?

Myers: I'm trying to remember where we were. It must have been Little Rock when I met them. Both James and Paul had come down. They had signed on, but they hadn't started yet—

Riley: So he came after you?

Myers: I think they signed on between the time I was hired and the time I started, but for whatever reason there was a lag between when they were—Maybe they were working in Washington, but they hadn't come to Little Rock. They had lives and stuff; Paul had a wife. So they were somewhere between. Anyway, I remember them coming for the first time.

James is already a character. He was not as big as he has become, obviously, but he was already a character. It was clear the chemistry between them and Clinton was good. That was important, having come recently off the Feinstein campaign, where the chemistry was not good. With new consultants, it was better. They seemed to be in sync [synchrony] on how they were going to do this. They both seemed like nice guys. It turned out Begala is exactly my age. We had a lot in common. We're still good friends. I'm friendly with James. I used to see them socially, but not so much now. James is James. He's a million miles an hour.

My first impression was there was kind of a competition for their services and it was a big deal that Clinton got them. I had never met anyone quite like James. His story is so interesting. He talks openly about how he was a complete failure until he was 40. One time he missed a flight; he was supposed to go down to Texas, I think, to work for [Lloyd] Doggett. He missed his flight and didn't have enough money to take a cab to the airport to get another flight, and he sat down on the curb with his garment bag and cried. That's one of the first stories that Carville told me about himself. This is not what I was used to in the braggadocio, swaggering world of political consultants. I didn't quite know what to make of him.

I thought throughout the campaign that he and Clinton were in sync, that he was able to keep Clinton focused. He was quite successful at it. No one was completely able to do it, but Clinton always had a lot of respect for James's strategic instincts. Clinton would do things like, literally, once in a New Hampshire living room he went off on a tangent about cold fusion. I'm not exactly sure that that was what people came to hear. James had a good way of being able to keep Clinton—"It's the economy, stupid. Don't forget health care, and change." And "Speed kills." All his little sayings.

I wasn't in the war room, because by that time Paul and I were on the road full time, and Bruce Reed and Bruce Lindsey and a couple of other people. The cast got pretty big after a while.

Riley: Another press secretary was hired?

Myers: Avis LaVelle came to be the headquarters press secretary. It was a surprise to me, actually.

Riley: Tell us about that.

Myers: For some reason I was in Los Angeles, and I got faxed. Somebody called me and said, "We had a fax of this release. They've hired—" I think somebody assumed that I knew about it and faxed me this press release. I was like, "What?" I called David Wilhelm and he said, "I can't believe that nobody told you. You'd been on the road, but then you got off the plane." I don't remember why I was in LA. I don't think it was a holiday. I can't remember when it was.

I sort of recognized the need for it. I was on the road and therefore hard to reach. The headquarters operation was running with a lot of very young assistants, and it was impossible, given that the ability to communicate wasn't nearly as good as it is now. I was out of touch a lot. But I really thought that I should have both been informed and had a hand in hiring the person. But David had hired Avis, who was from Chicago, somebody that he knew and had worked with. I don't know if he'd worked with her, but he knew her, and it was a *fait accompli.* There was nothing I could do about it. I wasn't going to blame her.

We were friendly. I still see her every now and then, just in passing. She's a very nice woman and I think she found it hard. She came in without any of the roots in Democratic Presidential politics. That was OK. We actually didn't talk that much. It seems like a weird thing. I'd talk much more to the assistants in the office than I ever did to Avis. It was not handled particularly well, from my perspective.

Freedman: Did you express your displeasure?

Myers: Yes, I called Wilhelm. "What in the hell is this?" I'm sure I used much more graphic language than that. David said, "Oh, no, I'm really sorry." He's very polite and hard to rattle. It was something that we had talked about, the need to do it, and it was something that I assumed would happen eventually, and that I would have a hand in doing, somebody who reported to me. But she didn't really report to me. It was a setup that was somewhat replicated in the White House in terms of people being layered in, in places where they didn't belong. Democratic flowchart management: it's its own, not necessarily functional, culture.

Freedman: It sounds like it's not that it was a bad working relationship—

Myers: It was loose.

Freedman: You went your separate—But that seems surprising, given what was going on at the time, that there wouldn't have been more coordination, daily contacts, conflicts. How did it work?

Myers: I definitely talked to her, but I talked to other people more. I talked to people like George and Jeff Eller and Dave Leavy, who was my assistant, whom I wish had come. I think he was there then; I can't remember when he was hired. But that's a great question. Honestly, I don't know how she would describe what she did. It wasn't like we had bad blood. We didn't. We were friendly. When I'd be in the office we'd spend some time together, and she'd bring me up to date on what had happened. A lot of it was managing the flow of information out of headquarters. George, the communications operation, was generating stuff all the time. I think Avis was instrumental in distributing that.

But I guess we both talked to George and to David. In the later part of the campaign everything flowed in and out of the war room. The plane connected into the war room. I did talk to the people who worked in the press office there, but Avis was running that part of the operation and I was running the road part. She was dealing a lot with people who, I guess, would come down to Arkansas and they'd want to interview David Wilhelm and Eli Segal or Mickey Kantor, and she would set up stuff like that. She wanted to be kept up to date on what people were doing, but that wasn't that critical to what I was doing.

There was definitely a need. We probably would have worked better if we coordinated more, but it wasn't as if we were working at cross-purposes. We had different tasks.

Freedman: How big is the press team with you at this point? How many people are really in that corps traveling?

Riley: Are you talking before the convention?

Freedman: Right, leading up to—

Myers: Myself—

Freedman: No, I'm sorry. I mean actual members—

Myers: Reporters?

Freedman: Yes. How big was that?

Myers: Prior to New Hampshire, randomly you would have one or two. Someone is doing a profile; someone wants to come out for a couple of days. In New Hampshire, everyone is on the ground, so people pretty much got around on their own. After New Hampshire, we chartered a plane, I think, and flew to Atlanta, and probably coming out of there we had a pretty good group. Maybe it was 30, 50. But that was sort of an anomaly. It was temporary. It might even have been

bigger. But the guy just survived New Hampshire, so he's the story, right? Forget that Paul Tsongas won. Clinton is the story coming out of New Hampshire, so a lot of people got on. That's great, let's follow up on this win.

We chartered a plane, got Secret Service, and everything changed. That was a very chaotic day. I did a rally in the CNN Center, I think. That might have been the day after the New Hampshire primary. Everyone is very tired. I think we chartered a series of planes for a while. We were in Little Rock, so it ebbed and flowed. There were trips where we would try to land a press plane and take a few more reporters. I guess at that point we must have kept that plane, a 727, I think. We probably had enough room up front for, I don't know, 20 staff maybe, and maybe that wasn't always full. Then in the back, maybe there were 30 or 40. I don't remember. It was ebb and flow as to how many people were on the plane.

The day before the Connecticut primary, we were getting ready to go to Connecticut for one event the day before the primary. We were at the Governor's mansion having a meeting in the morning, and John King, who was then at the AP [Associated Press], called and said, "Tsongas has dropped out." It was pretty early in the morning. Clinton kind of flipped—He didn't flip, but he understood that the northeastern kind of liberal progressives wanted to vote for Paul Tsongas, and he believed that they were going to blame him.

So we flew on a small plane from Little Rock. I think we were scheduled to go all along. So that afternoon we flew on a small plane that was like a ten-seater. There were no press on the plane that day. Clinton was very unnerved on that trip. We got to New York; we were gone for the day. Three weeks later—We stayed three weeks because we went right from Connecticut after Tsongas won—the campaign was really thrown off. He was out of the race, but he still won. That's why it was a Jerry Brown–Bill Clinton kind of face-off in New York.

I had to call my assistant, Dave Leavy, and say, "Dave, can you go to my apartment and get my underwear, put it in my suitcase, and ship it to me, because I don't have any clothes?" There was no way we were going home, so we moved into the Hilton on Seventh Avenue, the little one, and we were there for three weeks. Poor Dave, he has to go to my apartment. I said, "Here's a list of what I need." Poor guy. He said, "OK." I wish he were here to tell his side of that story. He did a pretty good job. "I need the green suit, the black shoes with the—" Poor guy, but he was my most trusted person, the guy I knew was going to get it done. I think he took one of the women who worked, Kathy McKiernan, with him.

Riley: New York.

Nelson: You all must have had a plan for how to turn getting fewer votes than Tsongas into "I'm the comeback kid," a victory. Am I right?

Myers: No.

Nelson: Did you know at what point you'd have enough votes, what a big enough vote for Clinton would be to declare a victory? Had you thought about that?

Myers: I hadn't. Maybe that day there was a conversation about it—I shouldn't say that. I'm sure there was some conversation about it, but so much energy was just into staying alive.

Now Stan Greenberg—I don't know that anybody trusted—There were just no numbers. Things were changing so fast. No one trusted anything empirical in those last couple of days. I think Clinton very much felt the tide had turned. Whether it was going to turn enough to save him—If he'd come in third, fourth, it would have been over. Whether it was going to be enough to get him to a place where he could keep going—You had to plan something, but it was chaos, because there had not been that much planning. It was all about keeping the head above water as opposed to getting out of the pool.

We flew down to Atlanta. Then we went to Florida. I think the trip was kind of a disaster. I don't remember how much time there was between the New Hampshire primary and Georgia, but there was a week between Georgia and Florida. We were campaigning in Florida and then we flew back to Atlanta on election night, and Clinton had won the Georgia primary. He said he had to get 60 percent. He got 60 percent or whatever it was.

I remember standing next to Joe again—I was always standing next to Joe Klein—and I'm saying, "This is like the Bataan death march." Poor George Stephanopoulos was in his black mode. He was there. George was always despairing. I don't know if George thought it was over, but I remember so clearly thinking, *God, we just got 60 percent in Georgia, and Joe Klein thinks it's over*. Then he won Florida. There were probably a couple little primaries the next week. I can't remember. There were just odd, dark moments like that.

I remember thinking, *It's not that bad, is it?* Maybe I was just Pollyanna, had my head in the sand all the time, but he said we had to get 60 and I think we got 61 or 62. How is that a defeat? But there's more to it. I just remember this as the Bataan death march.

Freedman: Are you standing next to Joe all the time because you guys are becoming friends?

Myers: No. I don't know why. He was always hanging around the staff. I was not especially close to him. I think I'm friendlier with him now than I was then, but George Stephanopoulos and probably James when he was around were always very interested in Joe's opinions about things and feeling him out. He was probably more important than any other reporter in the early stages of the campaign. Then it gets so big—He was with *New York* magazine then. I can't remember at what point he left for *Newsweek*, before the end of the campaign, but I can't remember at what point.

Riley: I was going to raise the issue about the New York primary. You said that you were in New York for three weeks before.

Myers: That's my memory.

Riley: We'd gotten reports before about the New York press corps being a completely different animal than anything—

Myers: Right.

Riley: Was that an eye-opening experience?

Myers: Yes. I thought, being from LA—It was another big city; it was a completely different animal. The whole tabloid thing drives it. It's all local. There's a whole thing about New York and there are all these characters, Gabe Pressman from WNBC. It's funny because now my memories of it have been somewhat colored by the fact that I'm familiar with it and that Todd, my husband, came out of that culture. He covered city politics for so long. When I think back, it was like, *You've got to be kidding me.* It was a constant mob.

Then Clinton gave them fodder—the Marcia Kramer, "I smoked pot but I never inhaled" kind of stuff—but he also had moments. There was a way you could feel him pulling himself up, too, as he traveled around the state. I also remember being in the city. I'm trying to remember being other places in the state, which we clearly were. We were still in New York when I went to my grandmother's birthday at the end of March. We went up to Canisius College, so I do remember being in Buffalo. It's a great Democratic town.

There was a debate there in Buffalo at some nice old theater, and it was Jerry Brown and Clinton. I don't remember much about the debate, except I guess George and Paul and I didn't think Clinton had done particularly well. We were driving from the debate to someplace else, maybe back to the airport, and we were going on about how, "He should have done this, and he didn't do that," and blah, blah, blah. It turns out the driver had gone to college with Clinton and she went and told him. We got in big trouble. It was like *so* high school. We got busted. [*laughter*] Poor George really heard about it. Paul and I only got a couple of comments and some dirty looks, but George I guess really got an earful. But she went and told him. It's so funny. After that we were a little more careful riding around in vans about what we would say.

Freedman: Can we go back to the Kramer thing for a second? Can you describe that? What was it like when you first heard it? How did you have to deal with it? What was the follow-up like?

Myers: We went to 57th Street, I guess WCBS is in the same place as CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] network, and Clinton went off to go to the studio and James and George and Paul and me and I'm sure other people, probably Bruce, were sitting in this room watching it on a monitor.

When I first heard it, I thought, *I'm sure that's true.* My first impression was, actually, as crazy as it sounds, because Clinton has allergies. He never smoked cigarettes, so it didn't surprise me. Then we looked at each other and I can remember thinking, *That's just weird.* Then I think when we walked out afterward, I don't remember if James or George or anybody said something to Clinton when he was done, but we walked out and there were a lot of reporters on the street waiting. I don't remember if I was completely sure that that was going to be the big story coming out of that, because I'm sure there were other things that were discussed, but yes, and it was New York, so of course, that's going to be the story. It's a perfect tabloid story.

It became one of those horrible things, a metaphor. People still say, "I never inhaled." Instantly it became part of the lexicon. It became—

Freedman: A T-shirt.

Myers: Yes.

Riley: Jesse Jackson becomes a factor before New York or after? I'm trying to recall.

Myers: Sister Souljah was in New York.

Riley: Were you involved in that?

Myers: Yes.

Riley: We've only got about another 10 more minutes, and then you can—

Myers: I'm sure you guys go through this. You forget. I haven't thought about being in that suite before Clinton—I don't remember what the event was—the Rainbow Coalition?

Riley: Yes.

Myers: I don't know that it was exactly clear how it was going to come up, but her comments people thought were pretty outrageous, and it was an example of drawing a line. So then Clinton went down and made the statement. Obviously it was going to get a lot of attention, and it did. Then I remember seeing Clinton go up in the elevator to Jackson's suite. Jackson was really mad. Wasn't it before that that Clinton had said some intemperate things about Jesse Jackson during what he thought was a break in a series of satellite interviews? That was in South Carolina.

Riley: This was related to Mario Cuomo, wasn't it?

Myers: I'm pretty sure Clinton was in South Carolina, which must have been during the South Carolina primary, which would have been before New York, and he was doing a series of satellite interviews. What did he say about him?

Riley: My recollection, which may be flawed, was that it had something to do with Cuomo, but it may have been that Jesse had said something critical of Clinton, and you're right, Clinton thought that a microphone was off and started yelling about "I can't believe the son of a bitch—"

Myers: No—maybe what you're morphing together is on the Gennifer Flowers tapes. Clinton said something about Mario Cuomo being part of the Mafia, and Mario Cuomo got indignant about it, but then actually Clinton called him, and I think Cuomo decided he was going to forgive him.

But then somebody came and told—I think during the break between these two interviews—"Jesse Jackson has said something about you and you might get asked about it." And he said some impolitic things about Jesse, and of course it was all hot on the feed. So I think the tension with Jesse Jackson had already been established. But it's ironic, because of course Jesse Jackson did not become a factor at the convention as he had in the two previous conventions in '84 and '88, where he was able to—Clinton had built his own relationship with the black community and there wasn't much Jesse Jackson could do about it.

Clinton certainly didn't want to alienate Jackson, but Jackson didn't have nearly as much power as he had four years earlier.

Nelson: He didn't have any delegates this time.

Myers: He didn't have any delegates. That's a good point too. He wasn't running. But I guess there was some conversation about whether he was going to run.

Riley: Or what his level of support for the ticket would be later on.

Myers: Then once it was clear that—especially after Clinton picked Gore—Remember after we won the California primary the whole story line was broker contention. It was horrible. But between then, which was June 5th, and when he picked Gore, which would have been July 20th or something like that, the campaign got on track. Jesse Jackson had no place else to be, so he was helpful after that, I think. I don't remember him not being helpful.

Riley: We've got just a few more minutes. Do you have any loose ends you want to tie up?

Nelson: I guess like everybody else who read *Primary Colors*, I wondered how much of what I'm reading is based on factual incidents, how much is maybe not factual but getting it right in some way.

Myers: I think it's more farcical, intentionally. It's meant to be kind of comedic. I remember the movie more than the book now.

Nelson: Yes, I was thinking Kathy Bates when you mentioned—

Myers: Exactly. Remember what a sensation that was.

Nelson: I do.

Myers: Mr. Anonymous. But the feel of it I think was in many ways a little exaggerated for novelistic, comic effect, and yet there were a lot of incidents that were true, and there was a lot of the poignancy of it, I think, for me anyway. I don't know what Joe's intent—Again, I morph the movie and the book. But to me, the essence of that movie was the scene at the end where Henry [Burton] is telling Governor [Jack] Stanton that he doesn't want to work for him anymore after the whole thing with the former Governor of Florida, Freddy [Picker].

He says, "What are you going to do? Are you going to go work one of the other guys?" He said, "No, I'm not picking between the horses. I don't like the game." He says, "So what are you going to do?" "Well, maybe I'll go register voters or do something that means something." And then, "Once you register them, who are you going to tell them to vote for?"

To me that was the essence of the book, of Clinton, of the choices that a person like Clinton puts you up against. He pushes you sometimes to the limit of saying, "I don't like the game." Then you think, *OK, so who are you going to vote for? Who's better? Who comes to this without flaws? At least I bring ideas and imagination and I care about this stuff, and you know that I'm for the people that you're for.* That was ultimately what always won him back for me.

At the end of the day I believed, and I still believe, that he's for the people that I'm for. I don't mean to make it sound like a team sport, but in some ways it is. Or just in terms of what your

values are—and there are a lot of ways in this national conversation about what values are. Clinton certainly has done some things that his, that all, of our lives would have been better if he hadn't done, but there are a lot of other ways to live values. I think Clinton's failure to do it in some ways has diminished his ability to talk about it in other ways. It doesn't mean that they're less important.

That's why I loved that movie. In a way, the movie was a little bit more distilled. I liked the book. Though I thought [John] Travolta was a pretty good Clinton, he wasn't as smart as Clinton. But at the end, it was that moment that Clinton always got you back to: So who you going to vote for? OK, all right, all right, I'll work for you. In the movie I didn't like—but that's exactly what happened, right? You see at the end that Henry has gone back to work. In the book it leaves it unresolved.

Riley: We've gotten off to a very good start and I think this is probably a natural stopping point for us. We'll shut the tape off for today.

June 3, 2005

Riley: Readers of the transcript should know that the timing of the interview is interesting because we just learned who "Deep Throat" was two days ago. It's too bad that we weren't able to record parts of our dinner conversation last night and our conversation this morning, because Dee Dee's husband, Todd, has been doing some writing on the subject. You know many of the principals quite well, so it's been a lot of fun for us to hear the inside story of some of this.

In any event, I usually begin the second day by asking whether anything occurred to you over our break that we should have dealt with yesterday. If you thought, just before you fell asleep last night, *There's a story from New Hampshire that I meant to tell that I just completely forgot about.* Or you're spending a lot of time thinking about your kids.

Myers: No, nothing. It may as we go on today. I was not kept awake by a sense that, *Oh, I have to tell this one.* But I think we'll pick up some of the threads from yesterday and last night, where things did come up that I think are worth circling back to.

Riley: We'll do that. I made a list of some things that came up last night that I'll refer back to here and there, things that we ought to touch on for the record. We've pretty much moved through the primary season. Were you surprised at the selection of Al Gore to be the Vice Presidential running mate?

Myers: Yes and no. Certainly the conventional wisdom up to that point was you had to balance the ticket. You chose a Vice President who was from a different wing of the party, perhaps from a different region of the country—in Clinton's case perhaps from a different generation. So the smart money suggested somebody like Mario Cuomo. If he wouldn't take an offer to become a Supreme Court Justice, would he ever consider being Vice President? I wasn't party to the process that Warren Christopher, as you all know, was running. I started out with an expectation

that it might be somebody like that, but watching Clinton over the months and seeing the list of people he was talking to, there were people who represented a broader range. It became clear to me that he was thinking about it differently. I certainly didn't have a clear sense of who he was going to choose until the day before.

We had gone down to Hope, Arkansas, for I'm pretty sure a *Time* magazine cover shoot. They wanted to shoot him in Hope, and they shot him standing on the railroad tracks in front of a little depot that said "Hope." It was a sweltering hot July day, and as we were coming back, we had to get into this little plane that had been sitting—I don't know if it was a single-engine, but it may as well have been. It was about as big as this table. So it was Bruce Lindsey, Governor Clinton—he'd also been that day to see his Uncle [Henry Oren] Buddy Grisham.

We were getting from the car to the plane and I said, "Tomorrow is the day. So who's it going to be?" He looked at me and said, "I think double-barrel change would be pretty great, don't you?" I thought, *That's it. It's Al Gore*. Because it was two young people, a different generation, a different place in the party than the last three or four Presidential elections. That's how I found out, and of course it was.

It felt risky to me that night. I was thinking, *Wow, that's kind of a risk.* The next moment, the minute they walked out together, it was clear, the energy—Remember how that took over? Just the picture of that and the energy that that created really was a tremendous boost going into the convention. Then coming out of the convention, it was like being shot out of a cannon.

Riley: Were you preparing a release or announcement package to accompany three or four or five likely candidates?

Myers: Yes, there was obviously a process of vetting that was going on. I don't know that there was a press release. I doubt it. I don't remember it. But certainly there was that information. Then, because that was all so closely held, there was obviously some conversation about what do you do? You have to go to wherever the Vice President is from, or at least that's the tradition, and then from there—I remember very clearly going to Tennessee. It was really hot that day too. We were in Little Rock and then we went back to the Gore family homestead. I have no recollection of where we went after that. That was the middle of the week, I think. We were going to the convention later that week or the weekend. The convention really started on the following Monday, if I'm not mistaken. But I don't remember what we did after that.

Freedman: I'm curious as to what the texture of a day like that is for you in your position. You're with the candidate, you're at the events, but are the press people coming up to you all day? You don't even have a cell phone at this early point, do you? Are you on the phone all day?

Myers: Yes, I had a cell phone. It was about as big as a shoe box.

Nelson: Did you keep it in the car? It was more portable than that?

Myers: Yes, it was more portable than that, and there was a guy named Adam Sohn whose job it was to keep things like that charged up. He carried a laptop. He was a really smart kid. He now works for Microsoft, designing software or something. But his job in the campaign was to be in charge of the printers and computers that we always had, the electronic equipment.

Riley: That came later. I remember a story about New Hampshire where Carville and George Stephanopoulos had to stop and rent a hotel room to get access to a telephone.

Myers: I think there were many, many parts of New Hampshire where there was no cell service.

Riley: That probably explains it.

Myers: I think it was hit or miss whether you could get a signal at that point. It's still hit or miss standing out on my balcony. But what is a day like that like? I remember snippets of it. There was a time set. I don't remember when we released it, probably late the night before.

Freedman: What does it mean to release it? Do you make phone calls or do you actually send out paper?

Myers: At that time we would have, probably. Now you just email it. Then we would blast fax it and make phone calls. I'm trying to think what the context was, because normally we would have been on the road, but we had obviously come back to Arkansas. I think we'd come back for a few days to finish this process. So I would have been living at my apartment and working out of the headquarters, and Clinton was obviously living and working out of the Governor's mansion. The first announcement was going to be on the lawn at the Governor's mansion, so there were preparations that had gone into that. I'm sure the word had leaked out before the official announcement, because somebody was staking out the Governor's mansion: "They're building a platform and press risers on the lawn," and that's in fact what happened.

Then I can't remember when the jogging picture was. I don't remember if they went jogging the morning of and there was a picture of them before the announcement. That's my recollection, but it must have been, because they didn't go jogging after the announcement. We got on the plane and flew to Memphis, I guess, and drove to Carthage. I think that's what we did.

Freedman: Nashville?

Myers: Nashville, yes. I'm sure I was over at the mansion in the morning. I can't remember when we got back from Hope, but I'm sure we were in the headquarters the night before, probably making sure that everybody knew. All the reporters would have been in town. So we did a combination. What you would do in that case was make sure it was on the wires. Then people's bosses back in wherever would call the reporter and say, "It just came across the AP that they're announcing the Vice President tomorrow." Hopefully the reporter already knew, but you were pretty guaranteed that no one was going to miss the event.

I remember it was probably 10 o'clock in the morning. I think the two of them had gone for a jog together and allowed the cameras to catch pictures of them, Gore wearing extremely short shorts, if I'm not mistaken.

Riley: The President not wearing extremely short shorts.

Myers: He did that often. It's not my recollection from that particular day; I'm not saying he didn't, but that was not unfamiliar to the American public. So then they went in and showered, I guess, because Gore had been spirited in the night before and had spent the night with Tipper

[Gore] at the Governor's mansion. I always liked that house. "Mansion" is an overstatement; it was a typically Southern kind of place.

Then we flew to Nashville, drove to Carthage, and I remember it being so hot. I think part of the announcement was made in the elementary school where Al Gore had gone to school. I might be wrong about that. Anyway, after that I don't remember where we went.

Freedman: Were the media less vulturelike in the preannouncement effort to ferret out—If you remember this past year, what it was like in staking out airports and runways?

Myers: No, they were like that. They were staking out the Governor's mansion and the airport. Being in Arkansas was helpful because you're not in Washington. You're not in a place where there's a big media center. That said, there was a good contingent of people by then covering Clinton. He was clearly the nominee. He was about to announce his Vice Presidential selection. I think the Gore thing—even though people didn't really believe that Gore would be it. The conventional wisdom was that they didn't have a particularly good relationship, they didn't personally click, and Gore was slightly damaged goods. His '88 run had some strong points and some weak points, and he was not perceived as an obvious choice.

Then the whole conventional wisdom about how you select—I think that threw people off a little bit. Then they did manage to get pictures of people coming and going from their interviews, Bob Kerrey and people like that. I can't even remember who else was on the list. If I thought about it, I'm sure I could, but there was definitely a kind of buzz around Bob Kerrey for a few days. John Kerry was obviously also on the list and was interviewed. People were trying to get as much information as they could. I think it had been held pretty well. Warren Christopher's a guy who can keep a secret. He may be one of the few.

There was no building sense of inevitability around Gore at all. It seemed so obvious after the fact that it was a great idea, whereas 24 hours before I don't think anybody would have leapt to that conclusion. So that was a lot of fun.

Nelson: Had they had an awkward relationship until not long before the selection? I mean, they were two rising stars and must have been aware of each other with a certain degree of rivalry.

Myers: The personalities are in many ways pretty different, and their upbringings were very different. I don't remember if there was anything other than the fact that they didn't have a particularly close relationship. Maybe in '92. In '88, Clinton didn't endorse Gore. But then they had a particularly good interview where they started to talk about—I never talked to Gore about it, but I suspect his interview with Clinton was not unlike Carville's or mine, which had nothing to do with what the Vice President is supposed to do. It maybe got to that, but it was all about we can really change the world. All of a sudden Clinton said he found that they were totally in sync on where they thought the country was and where they thought it needed to go.

That's really what sold Clinton on that idea; there was just a kind of a connect on their vision, which I also don't think was necessarily obvious, although in hindsight they were both DLC guys. But their personal styles were not the same—not that they need to be for that relationship to work. I guess [George W.] Bush and [Richard] Cheney aren't too much alike in a lot of ways,

either. I think Clinton forever changed the conventional wisdom about what makes a good Vice President.

Riley: Did you begin working immediately with the press people in Gore's circle?

Myers: A little bit. His press secretary, Marla Romash—I don't remember if I knew her before that, maybe a little just from around. We were in contact, but it pretty quickly becomes two separate operations. Mark Gearan went off to run the Vice President's operation. You want some compatibility of message, but that comes from a different level. That comes from Carville directing the people who are managing the day-to-day schedules and things like that. It has less to do with coordination between two press secretaries, because the whole thing has to work. So you have your schedule and your message and what's coming out of the candidate's mouth every day is being coordinated, much more so than Marla's and my day-to-day responsibilities of being on the road.

Freedman: In terms of that, I'm curious as to whether or how often there was any tension or conflict over—Where you say, "This is a crazy message," or "This is the wrong decision," or "We need to move in a different direction," or "I don't want to carry this particular ball today"? Did that happen at this point?

Myers: Between myself and the rest of the Clinton part of the campaign?

Freedman: Yes.

Myers: Yes. I'm trying to think of specific examples. In some ways, being on the road—I mean, obviously you're hearing and seeing the effect of whatever the candidate is saying every day. You're with the press on the ground every day, so you have a sense of what their feeling about all of it is and how they think things are going. You're trying to constantly communicate that back. There was broad agreement, I think, about the general direction of the message, so the conflict day to day was how do you keep the candidate on message?

There was a lot more tug and pull about strategic questions: Is North Carolina really in play? Where should he go? These were not decisions that affected me so much. My responsibility was more to try to help keep him on message, which was really Paul Begala's main charge, from a speechwriting standpoint, writing his remarks every day and trying to keep him focused, trying to keep him going.

He's like all candidates, and he was worse than some. You get tired of saying the same thing over and over at every stop, and the media gets tired of listening to you say the same thing over and over. But that's part of what makes for a successful campaign. It's part of why a person like President Bush is such a good campaigner, because he's so disciplined about what he says. He doesn't stray very far. No chance he's going off on a tangent on cold fusion. So that's the good news and the bad news about the President. Then there was always the observed with then Governor Clinton.

The press does get bored. They would observe something that wasn't supposed to be the message of the day, and that could often end up becoming the story, because it was unusual and it was something that they observed. Somebody would say something on the rope line. Something

would happen. Clinton would go off remarks at some point in the speech and say something he hadn't said before and all of a sudden we had another story. I should be able to think of examples, but it happened all the time. All of a sudden you'd have a story about something and it wasn't what you wanted the story to be about.

It could be outside events. There were always other things acting on—So my job was to try and anticipate that, to try to make sure the Governor didn't get caught blind-sided by events that were unfolding or questions from the press, or that the press was getting the information that they needed. If we were talking about a particular policy initiative or something—After the convention there wasn't a lot of unveiling of new initiatives, but there were ways to reinforce it. So you try to keep that and try to keep it interesting enough so that the press isn't tempted to go off in another direction, and yet you want to keep it consistent enough that you're reinforcing your daily message.

When something good happens, you want to try to find ways to amplify that. That's what your day ends up being. Coming out of the convention, we were on the first bus trip, which was also one of those moments that you can't create. It just happens. It was an amazing moment where everything came together and there was tremendous energy around the campaign.

But you know, weird stuff happens. We were coming out of six buses, and maybe three or four of them had reporters and two of them had staff. I was on a staff bus for the First Lady where we were going to go from Madison Square Garden to somewhere—Camden, New Jersey. We got to the bridge or something, and someone was checking attendance on the bus and she comes to this woman who's sitting there and she said, "And you are—" The woman says, "I'm Degee Wilhelm." Well, the one thing that I knew was that she was not Degee Wilhelm. So it turns out that some kookie woman had gotten on the bus.

We were able to pull off. I guess we had Secret Service at that point, so the Secret Service must have contacted whatever patrols between New York and New Jersey and they took her off the bus. Weird stuff like that never became a story, but it was the kind of thing that might have.

Freedman: Do you call them up and berate—What's your relationship like with these reporters at this point? If they did a story that you didn't like, or the campaign didn't like, do you pick up the phone and try to pressure them?

Myers: Normally if they're traveling with us, which a lot of them were, you just find them in the press area at an event. It would depend on what the story was and why. If Clinton said something that was particularly provocative, you really couldn't blame the reporter. If they picked up on something that I thought was nitpicky or irrelevant—"Boy, you're really just trying to make a story because you're bored and you don't want to write about what's actually happening—" I'd have a chat with him and I'd probably believe more now than I believed then that you could chasten them. It's clear by the way the Bush White House has succeeded in cowing the press corps to a certain degree that we probably could have done more of it, but I didn't really believe that at the time.

Riley: Like arguing balls and strikes, you don't get called in.

Myers: Yes, that's exactly right. I came from the idea: let them know you're unhappy with it, try to understand how the story happened, and try to prevent it from happening again. Bald-faced intimidation was not my style.

Nelson: So were there carrots in the form of a sit-down, an exclusive?

Myers: Yes, sometimes. You're always balancing; you have to be careful of playing favorites. Being a press secretary is very much like being a substitute teacher. It really is. They don't necessarily like each other, but they like each other most days better than you if you try to pick a fight. That was really true in the briefing room more than anyplace else. You had to be very careful. Even the unpopular members of the group would be defended by their brethren against the substitute teacher. So, yes, there's a certain point that it didn't really pay much dividend to have sit-down interviews, because they would always be about something off-topic. Inevitably, if you're going to have a conversation, they're not going to ask you, "Well, really, tell us, how great is your economic policy? How many million new jobs do you think you'll actually create? How many Americans will be lifted out of poverty?"

Nelson: Who are you going to put first? [*laughter*]

Myers: Yes, exactly. "We're so glad you're putting people first; tell us how that will work." We didn't get a lot of interviews like that. There was always something rattling around the edges of the Clinton campaign, so you had to be careful about that. Clinton got tired of it, and I don't blame him, having what he thought were extraneous stories taking over.

We did do interviews, but you tried to be pretty selective and there had to be some strategic reason. Sometimes it was just that somebody had been with us for a long time and hadn't had an interview and did have something in particular. Hopefully, there were people like David Maraniss, who would come along and say, "OK, I want to do a story about the evolution of Clinton's thinking on economic policy, and I want to do two one-hour interviews with him." We'd sometimes negotiate that down, but we'd try and find time to make it happen, a time when Clinton wouldn't be tired.

That's another thing you had to learn. There were times when he would be snippy and tired, which I totally understand. There would be other times when he would be magnanimous and thoughtful and would engage and really give the reporter something good and interesting and revealing in a good way.

Nelson: Were those predictable? Did he have times during the day when he was—?

Myers: Yes. There were ways to predict the likelihood but never the certainty, because somebody might say something to him. Or he might get a call from his wife or something that afternoon that would—but usually in the evening. He's a night owl. For something like that, you want him to be thoughtful and able to reflect and have a conversation. On the other hand, you also had to balance—His voice was constantly going out and he had to travel with "the wedge," we called it, a foam rubber wedge. He was supposed to sleep with it under his back. It was about this tall. It was highly uncomfortable—

Riley: Eighteen inches.

Myers: In my memory, it seemed about three feet, but it was probably about 12 or 18 inches. It seemed like an uncomfortable thing to have to sleep on. He'd been diagnosed as having acid reflux and was in danger of having permanent damage to his vocal cords, so he was supposed to not have caffeine. Degee Wilhelm was charged with trying to keep that part of his life on track, that he didn't eat the wrong things, and he didn't have too much caffeine, and he slept with his wedge. All she could do was put it in his room. I don't know if he ever slept with his wedge. At the end of a long day, or on planes, which seems like an obvious time, you'd have to talk loudly because the planes were noisy, and that was tough on him. There were a million things you were trying to balance to try to produce some value added to the campaign.

Freedman: Did the coming of the Secret Service affect things?

Myers: Yes, very much.

Freedman: Could you talk about that?

Myers: As I mentioned yesterday, they joined us the day after New Hampshire. So all of a sudden you go from traveling around New Hampshire in a minivan to having a motorcade with intersection control, and the press goes from having fairly easy access, at least in terms of proximity, to being kept at a fairly substantial distance. The campaign goes from having almost complete control over his movements to having to negotiate it with people who are concerned only about his security and not about how good the picture's going to look on the *CBS Evening News*. So that's a big transition. I think it's a very frustrating one for the press, very hard.

All transitions are difficult. So as we're transitioning and trying to integrate the Secret Service, I remember there were some issues. There were some issues around an event in the CNN Center. It was a rally and there were a lot of things that didn't go right. Of course the press was all too eager to write, "Campaign in Disarray."

In some ways it was the natural product of a young campaign trying to get a hold and work out a relationship where there were no limits on what we could do physically with this person, the candidate. But there were many limits. At the end of the upswing you have to have the downswing. So it's "Clinton Shoots Up," "Comeback Kid," "Campaign in Disarray." It's the predictable ebb and flow of the story, helped along by the chaos of growing that quickly, and of trying to integrate the Secret Service. There was a huge jump then. I don't remember if that first trip out we had two planes or one, but whatever it was, it was a big jump up.

A lot of people were traveling with us, which we hadn't had. We've got the Secret Service, we've got a lot of eyes on the campaign, and we weren't ready for it. Most campaigns aren't. I've never seen any campaign do it as well as the Bush campaign did in 2000. They made that transition seamlessly.

Nelson: Did you all trust the Secret Service agents at this time to be politically neutral? I know that issues arose later in the White House.

Myers: I think that depended on an individual's previous experience with the Secret Service. I'd worked on two previous Presidential campaigns doing advance. You have a lot of contact with them and you come to know that they're really very professional. They have their likes and

dislikes and they have their opinions—but they're really mostly concerned about doing their jobs. They're very professional and very discreet, the vast majority. So I had a very high opinion of them, and I think other people who hadn't been around them found them intrusive and bossy. But their job is to protect the guy's life, and they go to a great degree to do that.

I think Clinton found it restrictive at first. There were always people around him. Working a rope line and you've got two agents hanging over your shoulder—He didn't like that, but he got used to it.

Riley: Were there any incidents that you recall during the entirety of the campaign where some evident danger appeared?

Myers: No. I never saw it in the White House. There were days when you could feel that there had been some pieces of information, because you could feel the tightening of the cordon. Another thing that happened is that Clinton got to be very friendly with a couple of his agents. There was one guy named Billy that he kind of clicked with, and another guy named Pete Dowling. He really liked both of those guys. Billy was African American; I think a former pro athlete. He was a very gracious guy. I think Dowling was from New Jersey. He was an Irish cop kind of guy, a great guy. He and Clinton just hit it off. Once he felt like he could talk—

There were several details. You'd have three shifts, but they'd each have a detail leader and they'd rotate on and off every three weeks or something. The guys would be on the road for three weeks, then another detail would come on. Once he got comfortable with his detail leaders and some of the guys around him who really helped, they stayed with him through the campaign. The detail leaders all came with him to the White House.

Riley: So there wasn't a change after the convention?

Myers: There's a change every step of the way as the campaign grows. I'm sure the size of the Secret Service detail grew. I didn't pay it that much attention. There was the detail leader and then there were always the press agents that I dealt with a lot. The people that were on Clinton we got to know. Again, they were a really professional bunch of guys and you could work with them. You could sit down and say, "Look, this part of it isn't working. How can we make this look better?" They were always willing to talk about it. It's like the military mentality: We've got to make this work. The orders are coming. We're going to make this work. I think everybody really appreciated that.

In the campaign there were places where it predictably grew, but the campaign is always a little unprepared for it. After New Hampshire it grows. In June, Clinton becomes the nominee. It grows. You go into the convention thinking you've got this huge contingent around you. You come out of the convention, he's officially the nominee, and it's different again. Each step of the way the whole thing gets bigger and the scrutiny becomes more intense. I'm not sure anything really prepares a person who has never been around that for how it feels.

It was interesting watching Clinton have to adjust to each new level of people watching his every move. He always resisted it. He didn't like it. Then he adapted to it. He came to like certain things about it, this giant megaphone. Obviously the guy wanted to be President, so there was something he liked about being able to talk to the world. There was a lot he liked about that.

Freedman: I'm wondering—During this period you mentioned the occasional phone call from his wife that might be some sort of wedge in the day or make him a bit tense. I wonder if you could characterize that more generally. What's their relationship like and what role—She's obviously not on the road with you.

Myers: She was occasionally. She would join us for a few days and then she'd go off. She was understandably considered an asset who had her own whole campaign apparatus and her own schedule. I knew somebody would circle back to that when I threw out that little provocative nugget. There was definitely some truth to that. I probably saw it more when we got to the White House, but also on the campaign. It certainly wasn't the only thing that could upset him, and it didn't always upset him. A lot of times it was very reassuring to him. She'd call and say, "I saw your speech this morning and I thought you were great." Or "I had this idea that you should think about," or "I read something I know you'd be interested in." Sometimes she'd call and say, "You went off the reservation." Or she'd call to complain about something that was happening on the campaign. That could get under his skin a little bit.

The first time I saw her have an upsetting effect on him, I can't remember exactly what the circumstances were. We were in Dallas for a debate early in the primaries and she was there. I think she didn't like something before the debate. It rattled him in a strange way. It was the first time I had seen that dynamic where she could be really positive and reinforcing and sort of a force multiplier. She could also rattle him. It's probably true of any marriage. This is not just operating on how you raise the kids; it's operating on whether you're successful in this endeavor to become President. But they do have a very intense relationship. We know so much more about it than we ever wanted to on some level.

Riley: We'll delve into that more when we get into—

Myers: I bet you will.

Nelson: Let me ask you this: Was he a better candidate—more relaxed, more focused—when she was traveling with the campaign or when she wasn't? Could you see a pattern there?

Myers: I'm not sure. It depended on a lot of other circumstances. I think my life—and it's colored by this—was a little bit easier when she wasn't around. Not because of any tension between us, but because it just added another layer. Obviously Mrs. Clinton had opinions about—It just was harder for me to do my job on some days. It wasn't, "Oh, horrible Hillary's coming." It just changed the dynamic a little bit.

Riley: It's another factor to deal with.

Myers: It's another factor to deal with, and so that probably colors my memory of it. There were two principals to serve instead of one. She had a staff that was always protecting her interests, so you always bumped up against that a little bit. It just became a little more complicated. In some ways it was more fun. "Fun" probably isn't the right word, although it was fun. There was a dynamic that created more energy. It became a little bit bigger when they were together.

The same thing was true when he was with the Vice President, which was pretty rare, but that got a little bit bigger too. It got a little harder because when it was just our little traveling team,

which wasn't that little by now—It's like 150 people—but even so, we just had a rhythm. It's like when you have somebody staying in your house, it's nice to get back to just your family, even though it's fun when the grandparents come and everybody gets fired up and then you're always sort of glad to see them go.

Riley: Do you have any vivid recollections of the convention?

Myers: Oh, yes.

Riley: What does a press secretary do at the convention? Are you 24-hour spinning?

Myers: I really saw my role at that as to serve Clinton, and the truth is there's not that much—The convention is unfolding in its own way. You have this schedule, and there's a whole team there that's putting out press releases responding to the attacks from the Republicans. That's all going on, so you're paying attention to that and yes, spinning.

Freedman: Who's running that? Is that Carville and Begala together? George?

Myers: George was involved. George was overseeing it and Carville was involved in it, but Begala was writing the convention speech. That was taking a tremendous amount of his time, so he wasn't doing the spin part of it. I can't remember who was charged with heading it up on the ground. Somebody was there; I can't remember who. But George was really the person who oversaw that, and James.

Then of course, I'm trying to remember what day it was, Tuesday, Wednesday, when Perot got back in, which was very weird.

Riley: He leaves.

Myers: He quit, right, and then got back in later. I can remember ringing Clinton's suite and watching. Word had come, "Perot's about to get out, Perot's about to get out." We're standing around the TV in his suite at the Waldorf or wherever he was staying. It was like, "Wow, what does this mean?" I think Clinton thought it was a big dynamic changer. Clinton probably thought it wasn't necessarily a bad thing for his campaign, but it becomes a big story in the middle of your convention. All of a sudden people were saying, "This is really going to ruin your convention. Perot is stealing your thunder and getting out."

Was the claim made about the disruption of his daughter's wedding on that day? I can't remember. All of his kookiness runs together in my mind, although you know, Perot played an important role in that campaign, creating a dynamic that was very change oriented.

Riley: Right. In this case he doesn't endorse Clinton, but part of what he does is suggest that the Democratic Party now seems to be headed in a direction where he feels comfortable. He doesn't have to pursue his campaign anymore. So there's this kind of tacit endorsement that Clinton and Gore are headed in the right direction.

Nelson: When you hear Perot say that, does that have a reassuring effect that this actually is going to be a plus, or are you still uncertain how it's going to affect—

Myers: I think uncertain for two reasons. It's certainly better than the alternative. It's better to be Clinton at that moment than to be Bush. But you never know what Perot is going to do. He was very unpredictable. Just because he decided to step aside, I don't think anybody thought that was necessarily the end of the Perot story.

Riley: I think he may have even hinted in that announcement—

Myers: There are reasons that that is a strong memory of mine. "I'm not going to go away. I'm just suspending my campaign." Did he even say he was quitting it, or did he say suspending it? I can't remember.

Nelson: That's a good question.

Myers: He might have said he was suspending it, which then, of course, leaves open this big hanging question mark. So if you don't like what Clinton is saying in October, are you going to get back in? That was already a question. As soon as he was out there, there was this question of what next from him. Not, OK, he's gone now. It was OK, now what?

The other thing was that the convention had been planned for many months as an opportunity to reintroduce Clinton to the American public and to retell his story, because one of the things we'd found throughout the late months of the primary was that people thought he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He had this gold-plated education. He seemed like a guy for whom everything had always been easy. The American public had no idea what his story was. So the weeks leading up to and then particularly the convention were viewed as an opportunity to reintroduce him.

One of the things he was having trouble doing was he had this message that was about the middle class and making the economy work for people who worked hard and played by the rules. All of a sudden people said, "What do you know about that?" So the idea was to reconnect him to his struggle to get into the middle class, to make people understand why this is so important to him. It was all going quite well, the initial speeches were good, and everything was tracking, and we had this fantastic *Man from Hope* thing. All of a sudden, here comes Perot dropping a big stinker into the middle of the plan.

You don't get this opportunity twice, so there was a lot of concern about whether he was going to steal the show.

Riley: It's fascinating. I'm not sure from the outside—

Myers: The press was so eager for that to be the thing, too. "Oh, my God, this screws everything up for you," so it's like trying to keep everybody focused: "No, it doesn't. No, it doesn't. Let's let this play out; let's keep our heads down. We have a plan." There was very much that sense of, look, the public can walk and chew gum at the same time. They can deal with their feelings about Perot and be interested in what Clinton has to say, and in fact that turned out to be true.

Nelson: Maybe *more* interested.

Myers: Yes, maybe.

Nelson: Perot is gone and there is Clinton—

Myers: Yes, maybe. That was probably a line. Somebody said this certainly made this a much more dramatic moment, which is good and bad, right? High drama, high stakes, high risks. But Clinton's speech—You guys have not talked to Begala yet? You're working on it?

Riley: No, we have not.

Myers: My sense is that Wednesday night—I think Perot must have happened on Tuesday. Wednesday night was the surprise walk into the convention planned by Harry Thomason, and we were across the street, wherever it was. Harry had set up the cameras so that we could follow Clinton. All of a sudden it's "Clinton's outside." That generates such tremendous buzz in the convention of people who come fully loaded to be groupies for this person. [*laughter*]

Then all of a sudden on the screens they could see him walking toward—Is he coming? Is he coming? Is he coming? It seems so obvious in hindsight, but at the time worked so well. Then Clinton came into the hall and it was just thunderous and electric. Was it the next night or was it that night, *The Man from Hope*—that whole sequence of events? Then Clinton's speech, which was not that well received by the press. I remember Begala feeling—I don't want to overstate it—that it was too long; it was a laundry list of policy initiatives—all the things that people have always said about Clinton's speeches. It lacked thematic lift; it lacked vision. I remember Paul feeling bad about it.

Then, of course, Clinton was tinkering with it up until the minute he walked, probably still editing it, giving Paul hand signals from the podium. But the moment after the speech, when the traditional balloons drop and confetti and families dancing around the stage, was also pretty dramatic. There were some questions about Clinton, but there was a lot of energy. Unlike, say, John Kerry, whose convention went well—There was just more excitement about the possibility that this guy could actually be President.

Riley: Was Harry Thomason off on his own working on this piece and the stage prep for the convention, or was there a lot of integration between him and—

Myers: None between him and me, other than we had a friendly relationship. I had nothing to do with any of that. That was wisely left to somebody with a real flair for the dramatic. His wife, Linda [Bloodworth-Thomason], had done the video. I'm sure Harry participated, but that was really Linda's project. I think Harry had a good working relationship. There are times producers want to produce, so there were times when it was "No, no, no, no. Whoa. Bring it back, Harry. This is not the Academy Awards; this is the Democratic political convention."

I do think there was some tension there, because Harry had such tremendous access to the Clintons—30-year friends, or however long they'd been friends. It's hard sometimes for staff people to manage those kinds of relationships. You may get different stories from people who worked more closely with it, but I certainly thought at that point that Harry was mostly positive. It wasn't until later that he became problematic from my perspective. He was an Arkansan and an old friend of the Clintons, so that gave him a legitimacy. It wasn't as if we hired somebody from outside. It was somebody who really knew him and knew where he came from.

Riley: Was there any discussion of making any significant staff changes after the convention?

Myers: I'm sure there was. I shouldn't say that. I don't know if that's actually true. There were always things that people thought could have gone better. I don't remember when Susan Thomases took over scheduling.

Riley: I think it's later.

Myers: That was an ongoing frustration. There were tensions on the third floor of the *Arkansas Gazette* building—I don't know that they were any more than normal—between Mickey and Wilhelm maybe a little bit. Because I wasn't there every day, I'd hear snippets of it but didn't really feel I understood all the dynamics of it. Then Eli Segal—because the three of them had overlapping, in some ways and complementary, in more ways, responsibilities.

Riley: Can you elaborate on that a little bit? It's kind of confusing.

Myers: It was always confusing to me, so I don't think I can be too helpful on it. From my perspective, Carville was the chief strategic person, and between Carville and George, the strategy and message were developed. David was supposed to be the guy who figured out, "OK, given what the strategic goals are, how do we make the scheduling and the speechwriting and all those things coordinate?" He was trying to make the trains run on time. Mickey was dealing more with the politics.

I know these descriptions don't begin to capture all the responsibilities that each of these guys thought they had, but Eli was overseeing structural and administrative stuff. I don't know if David Watkins worked for Eli, but in my view he was on that side of the equation, which is, "Do we have money to keep the office open and to open an office in Paducah, Kentucky?"

Wilhelm was overseeing the field too, but there were strategic questions and then there were administrative questions. I think Eli was always the guy that you'd talk to if you had a problem about the plane. "We need a bigger plane," Eli was your guy. Somehow he was the CFO [chief financial officer], in a way. Mickey was the chairman and David was the president, or something like that.

Nelson: This question may span the whole length of the campaign, but I wonder, in your dealings with the national and local press, how did you go about that, or did somebody else handle local?

Myers: Local was mostly dealt with by the press secretaries on the ground. It was the job that I had in the previous campaigns. For the Dukakis campaign, I was the California press secretary. I was the person who knew what was happening with all the political reporters based in California. I would try to schedule interviews, or if they said, "OK, Dukakis has half an hour for local interviews. What should we do?" Then that's what I would do. I'd call the press secretary in Florida and say, "OK, we've got half an hour. What should we do?" Sometimes that would happen between Eller or Avis on the ground in terms of working out those details, depending on what was happening, depending on how well I knew the state or the press secretary who was there.

Then whatever the local press secretary wanted, if you could accommodate, is there some reporter that she wants me to talk to, or does she want me to help make sure that that person gets five minutes with Begala? Trying to make sure that when we landed and came into a place that the locals didn't get totally shut out. But my day-to-day relationships had much more to do with the nationals. You've got the *LA Times* on the plane, so when you land in LA, you have LA media there, but you've already got the *LA Times*. In California, I'd know everybody. Places I'd been I would know. In New Hampshire, I knew a lot of the locals by the time it was contested, and we won it, so we went back there a little bit, or Boston.

Nelson: Did you all think of the general election campaign as winning a series of states that would add up to an electoral college majority, or more as winning a national victory?

Myers: Strategically, you have to say, "How do you get to 270?" So you have your states you know you're going to win, which included places like Arkansas. Then there were 14 target states. There were special efforts to go to those places and campaign and spend money on paid media. But I think Clinton also believed that in order to govern you had to have consensus. You had to put forward something that you wanted to accomplish, and you had to get the American people to basically endorse that. It's one of the reasons that he was able to govern, in many ways. But he was also frustrated by the fact that he never got a majority, unlike Bush, who never tried to do that, in my opinion. All they cared about was 50 percent plus one. They were willing to slice the onion as thin as they had to and make the arguments as narrow and divisive as they had to in order to put it together, and now look. It's difficult for him to govern. I think his approval ratings, the approval ratings of his agenda, and the approval ratings of the Congress are at virtually historic lows because they never sought to create a consensus about a governing agenda.

I don't think Clinton ever did that. He believed that if he could just talk to enough people, he could convince everybody this was a better way. I think he really tried to do that. Obviously, in some ways he fell short, and in some ways he undermined his own efforts, but I think that he believed it wasn't just about winning a campaign; it was about being able to govern and achieve what it was you set out to do.

He was as much about the policy as he was about the politics, always. It wasn't just about controlling power so he could appoint Justices to the Supreme Court or cut taxes or whatever it was about bringing the country together to move in a particular direction. I do think that sustained him, that people had some faith that that was true.

Riley: One of the defining characteristics of the campaign from people on the outside who studied media was the use of nontraditional venues for communication with the American people. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about—My assumption is that there must have been some explicit internal discussions. "Do we want to go on [*The*] *Arsenio* [*Hall Show*] or not?" "Do we want to go on *Larry King* [*Live*] or not?"

Myers: Right.

Riley: Was there a conscious effort to move around the traditional?

Myers: Absolutely. That grew out of something called "The Manhattan Project," which was this whole idea that the public didn't know who Clinton was, that he was introduced to them as this philandering, draft-dodging, equivocating—

Riley: This is preconvention?

Myers: Yes. When we got toward the end of the primaries, it was clear. Then you had the Perot factor. A little bit before the whole energy of a brokered convention, because Democrats were dissatisfied with Clinton, there was a strategic decision, after winning the nomination, to redefine Clinton. One element of that plan was to use nontraditional media because the mainstream—This is all the seeds of Clinton's frustration with the press, even though the conventional wisdom is that he got pretty good press in the general election, but in the primaries he didn't.

So it was, How can we reach the public? What are our options? Let's look more broadly. People like Mandy Grunwald had a pretty strong hand in some of that. *Arsenio Hall*, MTV—he had done *Larry King* during the primaries, so that was out there—just looking for ways to reach people who hadn't seen him before and weren't going to be watching *Nightline.* It turned out as pretty successful, and it met with great skepticism in Washington, if you recall. I particularly remember George Will writing a scathing column after Clinton put on the glasses and played the sax on *Arsenio,* about how undignified it was and how unpresidential, yet the country responded completely differently.

Riley: Were there naysayers within the inner circle who felt it was risky and undignified?

Myers: Maybe. I don't remember, because I was on the road. Sometimes I didn't get all the blowback. The whole plan was pretty closely held. Clinton signed off on it. He was willing to do it. I think he understood that he didn't need to let ABC News define him.

Riley: So the candidate himself was comfortable moving into those venues.

Myers: Yes.

Riley: Was there any negative reaction within, asking the question about boxers or briefs?

Myers: That was, by the way, not until he got to the White House, unfortunately. He was already President when that happened. The first MTV, which was in June probably, was around the same time as *Arsenio*. I think we did it on back-to-back days. It may not have aired right away. It was in LA and it was great. Presidents do it now, but at that point Presidents didn't really do—I mean the White House does "Ask George Bush" all the time, 41, but it was nothing like the openness that Clinton had and the depth, the range, that he would show. This was really kind of extraordinary.

There were definitely people inside the campaign—I remember getting it more from the press and from people outside the campaign—traditional Washington opinion makers who thought—

Riley: The *Times?*

Myers: Yes, those horrible people at the *New York Times.* I think even though at that point it was Gwen Ifill and Mike Kelly, so you had this fun group of people, there were probably people inside the campaign who were uncomfortable with it. There was a certain dynamic already at that point that Paul Begala, me, George, were "the kids." It was always the kids' fault when anything was wrong. For a while, this woman Deborah Sale came on the plane, and her job—I don't know, I guess Bruce was busy doing other stuff and her job was to be a grown-up on the plane as opposed to the kids.

Riley: Who was this woman?

Myers: Deborah Sale. She was from Piggott, Arkansas. She worked for Stan Lundine, the Lieutenant Governor of New York, and she was an old friend of Clinton's. I don't know whose idea it was, maybe Susan Thomases's. I don't know if she was supposed to be a spy or what. It was never clear what Deborah was supposed to do, other than not be a kid. So there was that tension. I don't remember or I didn't pay any attention to it, people who thought that the kids had gotten out of control and were putting Clinton on MTV and *Arsenio Hall*. That was just an overlay of the whole campaign, and it obviously carried into the White House.

I think what happened was through that process—It was a mix, too. He didn't ignore the mainstream media. It was a mix. We said, "You don't get to define the whole story here. You have a role, and we honor that. We're not going to kick you off the plane or shut you out, but don't tell us we can't do this as well." The campaign got better. Clinton was good. He was always best when he knew all the chips were riding on red. So as we went toward the convention, there was definitely a building sense of momentum, helped along by the non-Washington-establishment response to some of this stuff. People were getting interested in him. People were starting to understand him in what we thought were more honest and real ways.

Riley: Were there well-defined limits to what you would do? Do you recall instances where you said, "No, he's not going to do an interview with *Penthouse*"?

Myers: I don't remember a specific one, but yes, there were definitely times when we'd go, "No, I don't think so." We did *Arsenio,* but we didn't do the other ones, I don't think. Did we do *David Letterman*?s

Riley: I don't even remember what the other ones were at the time.

Myers: Jay Leno, right? He took over from [Johnny] Carson in '91 or '92, right around that time, because Clinton had done—certainly '88 was with Johnny Carson. Anyway, all that stuff seemed much riskier now. Now Mrs. [Laura] Bush does the late night comedies. It's become accepted.

Riley: Were there members of the press corps that the President just could not abide?

Myers: Yes.

Nelson: As a candidate?

Riley: As a candidate, yes. He'd see X coming from whatever and, "I've got to get out of the room." Can you tell us who?

Myers: I'm trying to think if there was—

Nelson: Do you know Adam Clymer's *In the Eyes of Bush*?

Myers: Right. Poor Adam. Though he wears it like a badge of honor. I can't think of a specific instance. I'll let it roll around in my head. There were certainly stories that he didn't like that people would write, obviously. I remember more the people that he liked or at least respected, and they were the people who were more interested in ideas.

Nelson: Like who?

Myers: Maraniss. Joe Klein, people like that. He was much more interested in what they had to say. Not that he couldn't get upset about something that other people wrote about him, but the people that he thought understood what he was doing or were interested in engaging on substantive stuff were the people that he liked.

Nelson: Were there writers—

Myers: He liked John King from the AP because John was just a very good reporter, somebody who'd been around. He liked Mark Halperin, I think. But King joked around with him, was straight. He was writing for the wire, which is pretty much straightforward stuff. He wrote so much there were sometimes things that Clinton didn't like, but mostly John had an energizing presence on the whole campaign.

Nelson: What happens when there's something that he didn't like? Would you be called in?

Myers: Sometimes, yes. Sometimes he'd be wanting to debate: You've got to go tell So-and-So blah, blah, blah, and in Arkansas in 1976 this happened and then that happened. They obviously don't understand.

It would be some minute little development that wouldn't affect the arc of the story, and sometimes he had a bigger point that would. Sometimes he was mad. Sometimes he was justified. It was a fairly regular conversation about what was happening, punctuated by stories he hated, stories he liked. Sometimes I was surprised by the stories he liked. Sometimes I'd think, *I wonder what he's going to think about that,* and he'd say, "I thought that was really good."

Nelson: What's the flow of information to him? Is he reading three, four, five papers a day, or are you giving him clippings? Do you have somebody—

Myers: We had an operation at the headquarters, which all campaigns do, which is basically a clip service. They'd come in—before the Internet. Now it's really easy; you can do it all by 11 o'clock—and go through the papers, cut out the relevant stories, organize them by subject, and fax them to wherever we were. It would be 50, 60 pages a day. Then Paul or George or I would sometimes make sure that certain stories were highlighted, things that he needed to see. He'd

read the papers too. Papers were delivered. He'd look at them, but he'd also look at the clips. Some days he read them more carefully than others, depending on what he had to do.

Nelson: Did the clipping focus, in addition to national press, on those 14 targeted states?

Myers: Not so much—occasionally. I don't know if it was in the clipping package every day, but people paid attention to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* or the *Chicago Tribune,* because those were targeted states. But really, the clipping package, because you just can't do everything. And it was much harder. You couldn't always get them, but you could get them faxed from the press secretary in St. Louis, so if something broke in a state, then obviously you pay attention to that. But for the most part the clipping packages included the *Washington Post,* the *New York Times,* the *LA Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today,* and the wires.

Nelson: Apart from reading and monitoring media coverage to see how well—

Myers: Then there was a summary of the nightly news services on there.

Nelson: How well were your messages getting out? Were there any writers that Clinton or others in the campaign staff read because they expected to learn something from their analysis?

Myers: Yes, sure. No question about it. Different points in the campaign, around different subjects, there were just people that you paid attention to, people that other reporters followed. Maureen Dowd was still a writer. She would come out occasionally. She'd cover the campaign, but everybody wanted to be Maureen. She's a great writer, an eye for the deflating detail, so *everybody* would read what Maureen would write. Whatever impression she had, you might start to see seep into other people's coverage, so there were people like her.

There were obviously, again, the Joe Kleins of the world, who were believed to have special insights into Clinton because Joe had spent more time with him, had been following him before the campaign started, had been interested in the DLC and the whole idea of centrist Democrats, because Joe's big bugaboo is public unions, and he was always mad at Clinton because he never did enough to decrease the power of public sector unions. So there were people like that, people like Ron Brownstein from the *LA Times,* who was considered really good. People would come on and off.

Then you had things like Whitewater breaking; Jeff Gerth wrote the first Whitewater story. Stories would come out of different places and you'd pay attention. There were stories that you'd follow and see whether or not they metastasized. There were writers you'd follow simply because people looked to them. There were writers you followed because they were likely to come up with an interesting perspective or actually do some investigative work and come up with some interesting information on Clinton's record. There was a lot of that. There were always people noodling around Arkansas.

Then they would go down to Arkansas and I guess get into the Betsey Wright—Again, since I wasn't there, it was always a little terrifying. What goes on? What is it that happens when people disappear into Arkansas for a few days and then they come out? I don't know, but somehow that was like—I don't know if I even want to know.

Riley: You raised the Whitewater story; that may be a good illustration. Do you remember your initial reactions when you read this? Do you at that point start thinking, *I've got to find out what the story is here*?

Myers: I was confused by it. I didn't quite understand what the charges were in that first story. We were somewhere in an airport. It couldn't have been Kentucky, but for some reason I want to say we were in Kentucky. Maybe we were in Louisville, and we were supposed to go someplace else. It pretty much had broken that morning; I don't remember if we'd gotten any advance notice. I remember the sense of it quite strongly that whatever we were doing—Maybe we stayed, maybe canceled an event, or at least decided to go late to whatever was next in order that there could be some organized time with Clinton. I don't remember where Mrs. Clinton was. She wasn't there, but Clinton was on the phone with her to try to answer some of these questions and try to put the story to bed.

Riley: So it was significant enough that you—

Myers: It was definitely significant. I attributed it at the time—I didn't understand the allegations in the story. I couldn't tell whether it was serious. I still don't understand it. All these years later and I'm still confused by exactly what it is that they were supposed to have done. But it struck a nerve with them, which sometimes these Arkansas stories did, and it had to do with, in my opinion, this coterie of political opponents in Arkansas that was always willing to make mischief. Sometimes there was something there, and other times it was just for the sake of making mischief.

So it struck a nerve with them and it was unclear to me why, where it was going, if any of the other reporters would be interested in it. But there was clearly a buzz. I don't even remember what month it was. I want to say it was in late spring. There was a commitment. The Clintons wanted to answer these questions. They were very eager to say something about it.

It seems like it was one of those days when there was information. People had a lot of opinions about it, and that always makes you nervous when you're the press secretary. There is no simple answer where you say, "Here's the document that explains," or "Here's the answer." It was clear to me that was not the case. Whatever this was, it was complicated. It had to do with all that shadowy stuff from Arkansas, which again circled back around to Betsey Wright and people, and the one thing I knew was that I didn't know, and it was not going to be easy to uncover. But then it went away. It was a story and then it went away.

Riley: I guess what I'm trying to get a sense of is how, as a press secretary, do you deal with that? You're going to have to go out, and you're going to be asked questions about this.

Myers: In this particular case, they were going to go out and answer questions, which made a lot more sense to me, because what the hell do I know about this? Mike Gauldin, who was a lovely guy—You should talk to him at some point—was Clinton's Arkansas press secretary, and boy, he knew it all. He'd been there. I'm pretty sure he's from Arkansas. He ended up going to Washington and working first for Energy and then Interior, I think.

But occasionally I'd call him and I'd say, "OK, Gauldin, what is this?" He'd try to explain it to me, but there were all these characters and it was hard to keep them all straight. Meanwhile,

we've got real work to do. We're trying to win a Presidential election. I don't know how to deal with people named "[Robert L.] 'Red' Bone." [*laughter*] I don't know what I'm supposed to make of that. So I would occasionally call Gauldin. What we would try to do—and George would get very involved in this kind of stuff too, and Mrs. Clinton—was try to come up with an answer, an explanation for what Whitewater was.

Now I don't remember, because that story, it seems to me, was confusing. I think a lot of the reporters were confused by it, and I think that's what kept it from being—It broke, the Clintons were upset by it, they answered some questions, and it went away. Then it obviously came back with a vengeance. So what do you try to do? You try to provide as much information as you can to answer whatever it is. I don't even know quite what the allegation was, but it was that the Clintons had some nefarious business dealings around this project called Whitewater. So they tried to answer, and the original answer was, "We lost money. We did this, we did that. It's all been vetted," or something. I was eager to move on from that. I certainly didn't steep myself in the details of it at that time.

Riley: But you were happy to let the candidate—in a confusing situation like this—

Myers: This isn't something that has to do with the campaign directly. It's not something I'm really in a position to answer. I don't know. I don't know the players. This is the first time I've heard about this. It doesn't make any sense for me to try to do that. Maybe Gauldin, if he had—but he didn't. It touched on his role as Governor, because the allegation always was that he was given these favorable treatments in business situations because he was Governor, and Mrs. Clinton the same. This expanded over time. But it didn't even have to do with his being Governor. It wasn't a question of their public life and their public role.

Now I had had to deal with personal issues with candidates that I worked for before. Dianne Feinstein's husband was very wealthy, and he's even wealthier now, but his wealth and his business—totally honorable in my view—became an issue. So you can't ignore it. I wasn't naïve about it, but this was certainly not something that I felt I was even beginning to understand. Other people were certainly in a better position to answer the questions. As time went on, I had to become more educated about it. I had to know more about it, but I never felt comfortable talking about it. I never felt like I knew all the information was on the table. I never believed it.

Riley: We'll take a break in 10 or 15 minutes, a good stopping point. Let's think a little bit more about other questions that you might have about the campaign.

Nelson: I guess the debates.

Riley: Yes.

Nelson: Could you talk about debate prep, trying to get the press to accept your version of what happened in the debates and so on, the strategy from debate to debate?

Myers: First, there was the debate strategy itself. It was always our view the more the better, and the more unpredictable the format probably the better. We were always for letting Perot in, because it's more a blow to the President to have to stand on stage with him.

Riley: He's back in.

Myers: Yes, I guess that's right. I don't remember when he got back in.

Nelson: Late October.

Myers: The debate about debate drags until the last possible—It's like Congress. I don't remember what all the proposals were, but we were pretty happy with the overall schedule, which included two debates plus the third debate, a town hall, which we believed played to Clinton's strength. The first debate I guess was at Richmond, so we went to debate camp for the first time in Williamsburg for three or four days. Then the debate was at the University of Richmond. Debate prep was really interesting. Bob Barnett played Bush, and Mike Synar, who's since died and was Congressman from Oklahoma, played Perot.

Debate prep was fun, intense, and sort of scary. Clinton has—I'm looking for the right word—a petulant side, where he gets a little bit feeling sorry for himself. There were a lot of objectives to debate prep, obviously. One was to prepare him for each individual format. One was to hone down all the information, to get him to make the most important points in the time allotted, and one of them was to prepare him to hear what was coming and to get him through his initial response, which was sometimes, "You're full of yourself, Mr. Reporter." So we wanted to say, "Leave all that in the locker room." Part of what was happening there was to get him to blow through it. To ask the hardest, the worst questions, let him get mad, and then let him get to the point where he would joke about it. Sometimes he would go off on a tangent and then he'd realize what had just happened and he'd have a laugh. Sometimes he wouldn't have a laugh, but the point would still be made.

There was a guy, Michael Sheehan, who was a speech coach from Washington. I guess his business is mostly helping CEO types make better presentations. But he was really good, both on style and content, and Clinton had a lot of confidence in him. He was really helpful. He gave Clinton a lot of—some of it he would videotape and then Clinton would watch it. So he'd do everything first. First there were the briefing books—here are all the possible questions and draft answers. Clinton would go through and edit them, think about them.

The next day he would stand up at the podium, doing it almost conversationally. "This doesn't sound right." Then as he got closer, it would become almost a debate format, using the lights and the time and trying to go through the times of debates, even preparing his body. We tried to do a little of it at night because that's when the debates were going to be.

I think he lost his voice in Williamsburg, and that was a concern. The second one was in St. Louis at Washington University. I can't remember if that was the second or third. One was at East Lansing. Anyway, I don't think we did debate camp for the third one. We did for two and we didn't do for one.

The second debate was in St. Louis, but debate camp was in Kansas City. We were there for a couple of days, the same program. Synar and Barnett came. The first debate we thought had gone very well. I think Clinton did well on all the debates, but there are always things that you want to do better, and the format was different, right? I can't remember how the first and second differed, but then of course the third was the town hall. I'm not even sure we prepared for that

one. That was the third one, I'm pretty sure. Clinton was riding with a lot of confidence, and that was his forum.

He had a few moves. He knew at some point he was going to—because he did it all the time—walk toward a member of the audience. He knew he was going to move around the stage more. They had their stools, but Clinton knew he wasn't going to spend a lot of time sitting on his stool. Somebody would ask him a question—I wouldn't say that was planned, but it was inevitable. It's just Clinton's style. It had always worked for him in terms of engaging people. I think at the end of the debates Bush looked at his watch and all that. Those little things. This woman is telling her sob story and President Bush is looking at his watch. Clinton wouldn't have done that, and not because it was a bad debate tactic. He just would have been so engrossed by what this woman was saying. And that was late.

When Gore debated Dan Quayle, Clinton was very mad. He didn't think that Gore defended him enough. That was probably during debate camp. It couldn't have been Williamsburg, although that's my memory. It must have been in Kansas City. Clinton was getting madder and madder as the debate went on. He just didn't feel that Gore was defending him.

Freedman: What was the fallout from that? Was there a conversation between them? Was there staff-level discussion?

Myers: I'm sure there was staff-level discussion. Clinton is famously nonconfrontational, so I doubt that he ever called Gore. It lingered for a while. I think they eventually got over it, but Clinton was really mad about it. He was personally hurt and he thought it was a strategic mistake, so he was mad on both levels. Not only is it not loyal—It's not really a word that Clinton thinks of, but that's probably a less expressed sentiment: "My feelings are hurt."—but "That's a strategic blunder. Why would you do that? You have an opportunity to make the points that this campaign is trying to make and you didn't do it." He might have talked to him. I'm sure he did, because he called him after the debate. I don't remember what he said, but that's a famous thing.

Nelson: Do you remember the tone of his call?

Myers: I don't think I was in the room.

Riley: Was there a sense that he was poorly prepared, or he just didn't execute the preparation?

Myers: That's a good question.

Riley: Was there a great deal of back-and-forth between the camps? My guess is that Gore must have been going through debate camp, too.

Myers: Oh, he did, sure.

Riley: Who did they get to play Dan Quayle?

Myers: I can't remember.

Nelson: It sounds like Gore had his own debate prep team.

Myers: Oh, absolutely, a totally different team. I don't remember if George went down there for a day or if any of that happened to try to make sure that there was some strategic coordination. I don't remember where that debate was—the University of San Diego? I think it might have been.

Riley: Was Mark Gearan traveling? I should know this because we talked to Mark.

Myers: Yes, he traveled, although in April, I think, his wife had a baby. Yes, I think he got on the plane.

Riley: Good time to be on the road, when your wife has a baby.

Myers: That will really endear you to your spouse for a long time, to leave with a three-month-old. But yes, Mark traveled all the time.

Nelson: Either in the context of the debates or at other times, was there concern on the Clinton staff that Gore was a great idea, but this is a guy with his own ambitions to be President, and whose interests is he really concerned about? Did that ever come up, even as speculation?

Myers: Sure. I think people thought the Gore thing by that point was a good choice, but I think there's always some sensitivity to that idea. You take somebody who wants to be President and you make him Vice President, inevitably he's going to chafe at some point or in some places. I think for the most part, for the first six years, the Clinton-Gore partnership worked very well. But then two things happened. There was impeachment, and Gore's own ambition got in the way.

So, yes. I'd say there was some concern about that, but it was mostly assuaged by reality. Gore, I think, surprised people by his willingness to be a good teammate to Clinton, to pursue in some ways his own agenda, the reinventing government stuff. Sometimes he'd push Clinton on environmental issues, but not that much, as you can see by the record on that series of issues. But it came up from time to time.

I think people were more surprised over the long haul at how much Gore was willing to play the role. I think he believed, and I think Clinton probably helped him believe this, that by being a good Vice President and by being a good partner to the President and by making sure the Clinton administration was successful, that created the best opportunity for Gore to be President. I think once Gore bought into that, and I think he bought into it early, he mostly was able to keep his eye on the ball.

Nelson: I guess one last thing. Over the course of the year, what were your perceptions of the competence of Bush as a candidate and the Bush campaign? Did it change over the course of the year?

Myers: It didn't change that much, because if you remember, the Republican primary in New Hampshire—Was it then or four years earlier, "Don't cry for me, Argentina?" Was that in '92?

Nelson: Yes, and also the message, "I care." That was in New Hampshire.

Myers: Yes, I just don't remember. That was '92 also, not '88. Sometimes it all melds together.

Bushes into New Hampshire: I think there was a widely held perception that George Herbert Walker Bush probably wasn't a bad guy, but he wasn't a very good President. He certainly wasn't a great candidate. He wasn't a great President, but he was an even worse candidate for President. Whatever Clinton's shortcomings were, we knew he was a gifted campaigner. So I think the Bush campaign was hamstrung, but they were advantaged by the fact that he was President. There's nothing quite as persuasive as landing someplace in Air Force One. So they had that series of advantages going for them.

They were also more locked in. You can react more quickly and have more range of options, sometimes, campaigning not as President. So we saw the advantages and disadvantages of his Presidency. Being the incumbent is actually more of an advantage than a disadvantage, but there were ways that Bush made it a disadvantage.

As he went on, we kept waiting for there to be some strategic shift, some change in his language about "getting it," because the whole campaign became "He doesn't get it." He keeps saying, "The economy is great. It's coming back. People are feeling good." It was so clear if you were traveling around the country that people weren't feeling good; there was a lot of anxiety. Were they screening his crowds so carefully that he didn't know what was happening? Or was he just unable to acknowledge it? If Clinton had been in his position, Clinton would have found a way to be the incumbent *and* be the candidate of change. Bush never—So there was a kind of a constant waiting: Surely, they're going to try something else. Surely they're going to come back in and put a claim in. Surely they're not just going to keep saying everything is fine. And they did. We were happy about it.

Then we did stupid stuff like "Chicken George" during the debate negotiations. They didn't want to debate. They wanted one debate. They wanted no debates. So we sent that chicken and he started debating the chicken. Then there was "Butt Man." Butt Man was a guy dressed up like a cigarette butt. I don't remember what he had done to become Butt Man, but all these things would just get him—

Nelson: Rattled.

Myers: Yes. But "Chicken George" was the best, because all of a sudden everyone knew there was a chicken out there. No one sitting home watching on TV knew there was a chicken until all of a sudden, "Here's the chicken." Whoever did the chicken thing—I don't know if it was Eller. It was one of those silly things, but everybody got into the chicken. Where's the chicken today? Do we have a chicken at the rally? There were chickens all over America. When something like that started to work, it was great.

Freedman: I have one last point on this. Were there any staff-level lines of communication between the campaigns? We obviously know about the most prominent one, but I mean just generally.

Myers: What's the most prominent one?

Freedman: At some point I would imagine that there was a Carville-[Mary] Matalin—

Riley: Did that make people nervous?

Freedman: Yes. What was that like?

Myers: The fiction was that they had broken up, but I guess I didn't think that was completely true. But there was evidence it might have been true. Let me just leave it at that.

Freedman: The record is sealed.

Myers: Yes, a hundred years; this is sealed until after my death. James had a few other side shows in Arkansas, so who knew? But here's the thing, back on the record. This goes beyond—I think that there's a huge double standard between men and women and how these things are perceived. Men can sleep with people without telling all the secrets, but I think it was much more difficult for Mary. I think the fiction that they had broken up was more for her benefit than for James's. I don't think anybody cared. Nobody believed for a second that James wasn't 100 percent loyal to Clinton. But I think for women, it's, "Oh, well, if she's sleeping with him, obviously she's going to be telling him stuff she shouldn't tell him." *Please.*

Freedman: So were there other romances, other contacts between the campaigns? Did you have acquaintances, friends in the Bush campaign?

Myers: I was friendly with Torie [Victoria] Clarke. Let me think why I was friendly with Torie Clarke. We went on to cohost a show called *Equal Time* together. I knew her through James, but then I came to know her. We were very friendly. She was fond of saying her first memory of me—She had gone on the record somewhere, whatever her job was in the campaign, calling Clinton "a draft-dodging, womanizing, pot-smoking prevaricator," or something like that. Somebody came up to me and said, "What do you think of that?" from CNN or something, and I said, "I think she should be fired," which James thought was a little over the top, but I just said it. She didn't even know I was on the campaign; she never had any image of me until she turned on the TV and there I was calling for her to be fired.

Anyway, Torie was very good friends with a friend of mine named Lorraine Voles, who was working then for Harkin and later, after Harkin got out, came to work as assistant press secretary on the road traveling with me. So I knew Torie from that. I'd see her at debates, and we would be friendly. I still see her around Washington. I must have met Marlin Fitzwater at one of the debates, and he was very gracious to me during the transition and to the whole Clinton operation. He continues to be someone I'm quite friendly with. So were there other staff? Yes, there are always people. It's Washington; it's a small town. There were people who knew people, but there were no formal channels and there wasn't a lot of reason to be.

You'd come together to debate things like debates. People who happened to be in Washington—most people weren't, which I think was very helpful to the campaign—would run into people that they knew. It's always friendly in that opposing-camps-coming-together way.

Riley: I've got one more question before we break, and then we'll come back to the transition. You just touched on this, and it's something that appears in the briefing materials, about the different ways that men and women were treated in the Clinton camp.

Myers: I don't mean that particular instance. I mean in the world.

Riley: Sure, I understand that.

Myers: You're narrowing it to the Clinton campaign.

Riley: What I want to do is refine the question and ask you, did you perceive differences during the course of the campaign in the way that women's and men's opinions were treated?

Myers: Sure. I don't think the Clinton camp was especially guilty of it, but I just think that's a fact of life. When you add to that somebody in my position who was young and female, I don't think there's any question about it. Sometimes it was more difficult than others. There was a certain degree to which I accepted that as just the way things are. I think things have changed, even in the last decade since that, but I think being young and female makes it more difficult to be heard and to be taken seriously.

Some of the reasons are legitimate. It's easier for young men than it is for young women, but people who are young are perceived, often rightly, as not having as much experience as people who are older. So some of it is I think understandable, and some of it is other cultural biases that are very deeply ingrained. I think politics is a business that's changing, and it has changed a lot in the 20 years I've been in it. But it has traditionally been a very male-dominated business, like a lot of businesses that are about doing battle. It's a very competitive culture. So I don't know if John Tierney is right and women are less competitive or not, if you've been following his columns in the *Times* lately. But I don't think there's any doubt about it.

Riley: Let's break for five minutes.

[BREAK]

Riley: In your interview with Chris Bury, you indicated that the transition period of your entire time with the Clintons was what you considered to be the most difficult. I wonder if you could tell us what it was about this period that made it so difficult.

Myers: Having had very little experience with winning at that point, on election night we flew around doing that last thing and landed back in Arkansas. I was convinced Clinton was going to win. That night, we went through the election night festivities and it was pretty great. We were out somewhere and all of a sudden I realized it was about midnight or one o'clock in the morning. *We've got to work tomorrow*. This was not something that had happened to me much in the past. Usually the next day was you straggle in hung over at noon and clean out your desk.

So I rounded up the press staff in various bars around Arkansas and said, "All right, who wants the first shift? We have to staff the place by about eight o'clock." We got 900 press calls over the next couple of days. We had no infrastructure to deal with it. I had a staff of maybe 10.

Japan TV, "We'd like to interview the President-elect." It was the next jump. It's what I was talking about. You go through these levels and you think you're prepared to handle it because you're traveling around. We had three planes on the last legs of the campaign. We had a good-sized staff. All of a sudden he went from being a candidate for President to being the President-

elect, and it changed again on January 20th, when he became the President, in the days right around the inaugural.

So that period was one where resources didn't match the demand. There had been some transition planning, but it wasn't nearly as far along as I know that the Kerry planning was this time. There was office space; the phones were laid. We were working out of the campaign headquarters. Part of the difficulty came that half the transition was then in Washington, half of it was still with Clinton in Arkansas. So that made it difficult. We had to reinvent the wheel again. So this process began. People were unsure what their jobs were. I can't remember at what point I was told, for example, that I would be the transition press secretary. I assumed that I would, but I knew that somebody at some point was going to have a conversation about that. I didn't have an expectation that I would be White House press secretary. I didn't think at that point that they would give me that job. I wanted it, I hoped, but I didn't believe that it would happen. But I did think I'd probably be transition press secretary. I was there. I knew everybody. It made sense to keep me there. It didn't necessarily, in my mind, mean that I would become White House press secretary. I think in some other people's minds it did.

But nonetheless, what can you do? You just pick up and keep functioning. So there's the personal uncertainty, then the chaos of the swirling thing, trying to catch up with what it's supposed to do, trying to catch up and move. We were going to move out. We didn't need a field staff anymore. We didn't need all the space we had for fund-raising and things like that, although most of the fund-raising had been in Washington by that point, but, nonetheless. We were moving out of the *Gazette* building into whatever the government-funded space was, which was a much more corporate office building a couple of blocks away.

I remember at one point they asked us—I can't even remember who was running the transition, but—John Hart, I think it was, came to me and said, "We've designated some space for the press operations. You need to come over and look at it and figure out how many phones you need and where you want—" We then had teletype things where wires were received, not online. You had to have a special machine that required the installation of special equipment and so on. I must have been told, "You can have so many slots and you can hire so many people to work on the transition." I don't even remember if they had told me I had a job, but nonetheless I was functioning.

I went over and they said, "Here's your space. Here's a little private office in the corner." It had windows. It was an odd office, triangular. I said, "OK, So-and-So will sit here. We'll have this person do that, we'll put the teletype and our TVs here." So off I went, and a few days later—I'll decide later how I want to treat this piece of information—Susan Thomases, who was going to be the scheduler for the transition, decided she wanted my space. I think the people had already come and laid my phone lines and put my teletype machine in, and she was given a different space with a small office with no windows.

I said, "You've got to be kidding me. We're ready to move today." "No, sorry, Susan wants your space." So I went to some of the more senior people in the campaign and was told, "Don't. This is a fight you don't want to have." So that put us back a week. We're trying to operate off phones, but we're not in our office space. I'd gone over when I was asked to and looked at the transition space and made the decisions, prepared my group to move, and she hadn't. She came

and took my office space and put my group behind a week. Meanwhile, we're getting creamed for a disorganized transition, partly because nobody can reach anybody who can tell them what the schedule is, who's briefing today, and what's going on.

It was incredibly frustrating, and that was just one example of the kind of things that went on. For me also, this presages the kind of fights that I knew were coming. Unnecessary. The transition was going to last a couple of months. Who cares if you have a window? I would have happily taken the windowless office. I don't care. It was the fact that I had already made the arrangements to move. Our stuff was boxed up. We had to go back and unbox it. It was literally the day that we were moving. So start all over. It cost the transition probably $20,000 to reinstall everything.

Freedman: She just wanted it because she wanted it? She didn't have a case for why?

Myers: I think she made one up about being closer to some other office, but it was irrelevant. It didn't really matter.

Freedman: Nobody saw the implications of this?

Myers: Everyone saw it. No one was willing to take it on, because Susan was a protected person. Don't die on that hill; it's just not worth it. So yes, it set the press office back a week in the grand scheme of things. Does it really matter? No. It cost the campaign $15,000 or $20,000, I don't remember. It seemed like a lot of money to me at the time. It's how bureaucratic decisions get made.

I just decided to get over it and do the best we could, but it was incredibly frustrating. Then we had to try and find a space, which ended up being an old department store that was close by to where the transition office was, where there could be a briefing space. George was doing the briefing. Another thing that I thought presaged me—I never thought for a second George would be White House press secretary. He didn't want to be, or so he said. That was not the role he envisioned himself in, but he did do the briefings, so I didn't know. I thought maybe they would bring back Hodding Carter or somebody else for a while, but, quite honestly, I didn't think that much about it because there was so much else going on.

Freedman: Whose decision was it for him to be doing the briefings during the transition?

Myers: Ultimately the Clintons', I guess.

Freedman: Did you resist?

Myers: No.

Riley: George had gotten off the plane a long time earlier and then he'd settled in Little Rock.

Myers: Right. He had been in Little Rock from the very beginning. He came in September of '91, so he was based there, had an apartment there.

Riley: He went to New Hampshire just to help put the fires out there.

Myers: Yes, but he was with Clinton. Everyone was staying at the Hard Day's Inn for weeks on end. But he drove his car—Everything was in Arkansas. George had an interesting habit, which he no longer has. He'd just move out of an apartment and leave everything, just get in his car and go to the next apartment. Everything, towels, it's the weirdest thing. [*laughter*] Let me just say that the house he currently lives in I'm sure he won't do that. He won't leave his kids.

Riley: He's had another one.

Myers: Yes, I know, I saw Ellie's [Elliott Stephanopoulos] sister on Wednesday. It was a little girl.

Riley: It was in the Style section. They went to eat at the same Mexican restaurant that induced labor the first time.

Myers: No kidding? How funny!

Riley: It worked again.

Myers: So neither surprised me, I have to say, to the degree that I had thought about it, which was not that much. During the campaign, you're sprinting toward the finish line and just trying to get across it, but it seemed natural to me that George would do it. He was senior to me. I considered myself more or less reporting to him. So that seemed like a natural—I had never worked in Washington.

The next step, I didn't know what to expect. The Cabinet selection process started and people were flying in and out of Little Rock. There was a tremendous amount of running around. I just saw Warren Christopher land at the airport. Warren Christopher was there running the transition for a good part of the time. Bad example. But all these people were coming and going.

Reporters were tripping all over themselves, speculating about who was going to get one job, which is really one of the worst circumstances. There are questions that will ultimately be answered. Why does it matter? Why is everyone scrambling to get it 15 minutes before somebody else gets it? I really don't understand why that's a badge of honor, to be able to get something that we're going to tell you. There is not going to be a Cabinet room full of people with bags over their heads on January 20. We promise we're going to tell you.

The same exact thing I thought about the Supreme Court later on. Come the first Monday in October, there will not be eight justices and one guy or one woman with a bag over her head. Anyway, that all made for constant chaos and uncertainty on top of the uncertainty, and I was trying to manage my own little staff of people who'd worked their hearts out on this campaign and were all asking, "Am I going to get a job?" All I could say was, "I don't know." I certainly didn't know what to expect.

There were all these announcements of the Cabinet, and finally the last Cabinet Secretaries were appointed on December 23. I flew home that day with Warren Christopher and it was so interesting because they bumped us both up to first class. I'm sure he was already flying first class. We got to Los Angeles, and I got up to get off the plane, and all of a sudden these two U.S. marshals got on the plane and said to him, "Come off plane side." *Oh, he's the Secretary of State*

designee now and I'm just a staffer. See you back in Little Rock, Mr. Christopher. That was really a moment where I realized we're going to that next level, where he's traveling as a protected person.

Riley: You obviously thought about what your position would be. Where did you think you were going to be?

Myers: I went home for a few days at Christmas, and I think flying back with Christopher, who I had known a little bit from Los Angeles—He was part of that Bradley circle—I didn't talk to him about what my job would be, but I thought, *Well, maybe what I should try to do is go to an agency.* I thought briefly about the State Department, but I don't know anything about foreign policy. But then I'm not sure. I thought maybe I'd go to an agency as the top person and come back to the White House at some point, depending on who they'd hire as White House press secretary. But I told my parents, "I really don't think they'll give me the job."

Freedman: Because?

Myers: I was 31 years old and I wasn't doing the briefings during the transition and I didn't have the Washington experience. I knew Clinton liked me, and I was certain I would get a job. I didn't know what it would be, and I didn't know if I should try to figure out what I wanted to lobby for. But at some point George Stephanopoulos came to me and said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want to be White House press secretary," thinking, *I want to start the seventh game of the World Series for the Dodgers, OK? That doesn't mean I'm going to get to do it.*

Then, fast-forward—We stumble through the transition, which wasn't going that well. It was going OK, and then it was punctuated by the beginning of the gays in the military and stuff like that. We were going to leave Arkansas for Washington on January 16 or whatever day it was, and it was a couple of days before that, so maybe it was January 14. I was at the Governor's mansion. I don't remember if somebody had asked me to come over there or if I just happened to be there. George was there and Ricki Seidman, who had been one of the lawyers, one of the vetters of personnel. I don't remember what her job was in the campaign. She was someone I had known for a number of years.

They said, "OK, here's the deal. You're going to be the White House Press Secretary. Your title will be White House Press Secretary, but you'll be a Deputy Assistant to the President. George will do the daily briefing." I said, "That's a prescription for disaster. You give me the responsibility for the job but not the authority, it's not going to work." George said, "I don't want to brief. The Clintons want me to keep doing that because I've been doing it, but I see myself transitioning out of that and you transitioning into that eventually. So don't worry about that."

Riley: George wanted to be what?

Myers: Counselor, what he was doing then, which was strategic communications. Overseeing speechwriting and communications and press, what he'd done during the campaign and the nexus of policy and communications, I think. That was how he envisioned himself, the strategic guy in the White House. It was clear James wasn't going in. "I would never live in a country whose government would hire me." He and Paul weren't going in. Then he looked at me and said, "When the President of the United States asks you to do something, you can't say no."

Freedman: She said that?

Myers: No, George said that. But they were both saying, "Look, it's not perfect, but—" But I knew. I had watched this happen. It's something that happens to women, which is you're given the responsibility and not the authority. I remember when I decided I wasn't going to let it happen to me was in 1988, watching Susan Estrich elevated to the position of campaign manager on the Dukakis campaign in a way in which she was destined not to be able to succeed. She struggled along and did the best she could, but it was clear the people around Dukakis were back-channeling her and she never really got the authority to run the campaign.

I said to myself at that point—I was 26 or 27 years old—*I'm going to be very careful not to let this happen to me.* I walked into that situation knowing that was exactly what I was doing. But hope trumps reason and experience. I said, "OK." George has been a good ally to me. We've been friends for, by then, five years, worked very closely together without incident, got along with very few disagreements. Sometimes we'd disagree, but we always got along. I trusted him. I believed that he didn't really want to do it. He didn't seem to like it during the transition. It was always a little bit like going to the dentist for him. There was obviously something about it he liked, but—so I said, "OK." What am I going to do?

Then I had about 15 minutes to hire staff, which was another sea of problems for me. At noon on January 20 he's going to be President, and the White House press corps—I'd figured this much out—is going to expect there to be a functioning press office. It's now January 16, I'm the press secretary, and I don't have a staff. I had my little cadre of people who had worked in Arkansas and I was told, "You must hire an African American." Five days, I don't have one on my staff now, a senior person. You have this many slots and one of your senior people has to be black.

So I hired Lorraine Voles, who had been my deputy on the campaign, and then I had to decide which of the kids working for me—so I called them all in and I said, "Here are the slots I have." And I offered some of them jobs. To some of them I said, "I can't offer you a job, but if you come to Washington, if you're willing to take the risk, I promise something will work out for you." They all came, and they all got jobs eventually. I hired Arthur Jones. I hired him quickly. I didn't know him that well. He was a very nice man, but it just didn't work out that well.

Riley: You had no experience with him.

Myers: I had no experience with him. I interviewed him for an hour. I had to have somebody in the chair. Between Arthur and me we had zero years of Washington experience and didn't know each other, and he didn't even have the campaign experience.

Freedman: What was his background?

Myers: He was press secretary to the mayor of Boston, I guess Mayor [Raymond] Flynn at that point. So I went in there already at a disadvantage, put at a further disadvantage by the circumstances. You do the best you can.

Freedman: Whose decision was it to impose the quota?

Myers: Susan Thomases had handled the staffing. She was the top person, so I don't know exactly. I don't remember who told me that, probably George.

Riley: Susan's job during the transition was personnel?

Myers: Yes, indeed. Things like deciding where everyone's offices were going to be, with Jeff Eller, who somehow got into that. It became part of his job figuring out space. But she ran the personnel piece of the White House, which was another reason that I was surprised that I got that job. But the only reason that I got it was I think the President-elect wanted to find a place for me.

Remember, there had been all that stuff about the bean counters. He had gotten himself into a pickle about appointing women. I think after the whole Cabinet fiasco he was being forced to appoint a woman as Attorney General but hadn't done that yet. By the time he had, Zoë Baird had fallen apart, so there was increased pressure on him to put women in visible positions. So we'll call Dee Dee the press secretary, but we won't really give her the job.

Riley: Then your designation was Deputy Assistant, and you were not alone as a woman being appointed to head an office but designated Deputy Assistant as opposed to Assistant to the President.

Myers: I'm sure that's true. Christine Varney also might have been a deputy.

Riley: She and maybe Joan Baggett.

Myers: Yes, Christine and I are friends to this day over being both put in positions where we were never given the real authority to do our jobs and then you get blamed for the bad result, but, you know, hope springs eternal, and we just kind of plowed into it. Of course it got rough on Day One because it was the night—was that Kimba Wood who had to resign on the first night?

Riley: She was never—

Myers: I guess it was Zoë Baird. She had been named and then we went through a couple of weeks of trying to hold it together. Then that ultimately collapsed because whatever night January 20 was, maybe a Wednesday or Thursday, I remember Clinton coming into the press secretary's office, which of course was George's office and not mine, and sitting in George's chair in gray sweatpants, if my memory serves, as we had to hash out—It was like one o'clock in the morning. No one had slept for days. Everyone was exhausted. I remember being so exhausted.

Riley: Did you go to the balls?

Myers: I did. My family came, my parents, both of my sisters, a couple of my aunts, their husbands and families. It was fun. I was glad to have my family there, but it was very hard to spend any time with them because you're both trying to manage the responsibility you have for the transition and the inaugural events, which wasn't much, but nonetheless, you wanted to participate in them and try to get ready. You move in—You can't even set foot in the place. You had to go over there and get your pass ahead of time, but you can't really even set foot in the

place until noon, at which point you're supposed to be running the country. That's a terrifying thing.

Then of course the first thing that happens is the Attorney General nominee collapses. OK, so everyone is exhausted. There was a lot of energy and excitement too around the inaugural. I can remember being with some of the campaign staffers on the [National] Mall for the big extravaganza. That was the first day that we were back, I guess, and they did a big concert produced by Quincy Jones and it was great. I came for part of it, and at the end they did a flyover, which is something you get very used to when you're working for the President, but something we hadn't seen at that point. All of a sudden it's, "Oh, yes, those guys work for Bill Clinton now."

Then on the morning of the inauguration, Clinton had gone to a service at the AME [African Methodist Episcopal] church and I had gone with him and then came back to the Blair House and Colin Powell came in to give him the nuclear codes. He, and it must have been Tony Lake, went off into—by memory it was the dining room—and they closed the door. Colin Powell gave Bill Clinton the nuclear codes or explained to him. It's above my security clearance. Anyway, he came out and I guess walked across the street to the White House.

Riley: Your first entry into your office?

Myers: That was later. I had been in the White House only one time before, and it was during the transition when Clinton had come for what Clinton described as his exit interview with President Bush. So that would have been November. They did a photo op in the Rose Garden under the portico and all of our press—the Clinton traveling press and the White House press—It was like a zoo. After they finished the picture, a lot of reporters turned and started asking me questions. I don't even know what they're asking me, and all of a sudden some very officious aide came up to me and said, "No spinning in the Rose Garden," and literally pushed me into where I didn't know where I was. They made me go sit in the west lobby. I remember also thinking, *You don't own when you're here, you rent. Some day I'll be walking out of this place too, and I hope I never develop that sense of you don't belong here, this is our place.*

I understood losing and how painful that must be, but also, come on, give it a rest. You do move everyone out of the Rose Garden, people do not linger in the Rose Garden, so that's fine. We did that all the time. After an event that's a secure space, and you move everybody out. But "No spinning in the Rose Garden—" [*laughter*]

Riley: So your first entry into the White House after that?

Myers: I went from the Rose Garden in through the door there by what I would later learn was the press office, and then down the hall toward the west lobby, which is a short walk. I walked right past the office that I would have. I didn't know that that would be my office, although maybe I did, because maybe somebody went back to see if Marlin was in, and he wasn't. I did say I thought maybe I'd go back and see if he'd talk to me for a few minutes, but he wasn't there.

Nelson: Can I ask a broader transition question? It sounds as if you all were learning by doing during the transition process, and yet you did have at least one set of alumni from a Democratic administration who might have been able and willing to tell you, here are the mistakes we made,

here are the successes we had. Was there any interest among the Clinton people in consulting closely with the Carter people?

Myers: Yes, there was some. But it was 16 years ago, and I think people felt the world had changed a lot in 16 years. Different people did. I talked a little to Jody [Powell]. I know George talked to Jody Powell. A friend of mine did a paper for me about how White House press offices were structured to try to help me. She just called me and said, "I'm going to do this for you." She's my friend who just got a PhD at Michigan State in political communications.

Nelson: What's her name?

Myers: Ali Webb. She actually works for the Kellogg Foundation there on rural voting project stuff. She's great. She went on to the press secretary at Ag, but she was living in Washington then and was press secretary for Bradley, whom I had worked for in the Mondale campaign, so we were very old friends. That was helpful because it just gave me some perspective on how these things work and something I hadn't had time to think very much about. What was your question?

Nelson: I was asking in general how much did you think Carter and his people had something to teach you?

Myers: Not enough, one. I think the 16 years made a difference. I think there was a lot of sensitivity about Carter because of the perception that he was a President who had a rough end. There was a lot of sensitivity at the convention about whether to give Carter a speaking role, which is unfortunate. I think Clinton should have just done it. Republicans are better about that, just, "He's our former President." Certainly the convention-goers would have given him a warm response, as they did.

So anyway there was a sensitivity about not being too closely associated with Carter. There was a sensitivity about it having been 16 years, and there was a sensitivity about something that we created, which was the idea that we were not going to do things the old way; we were going to reinvent Washington, which was idiotic in hindsight, but nonetheless we were stuck with that.

So instead of learning from—And that's another reason why I think Susan Thomases, the Clintons, whoever was making these decisions, did not reach out to somebody. I'm not saying Hodding Carter was the right guy, but somebody like that with some stature in Washington, with some experience, who could have really helped with the press transition. I'm not sorry things worked out the way they did for me. Who knows what would have happened if somebody else had gotten the job out of the box? The fact that it was me changed my life, in spite of it being far from the way you would want to go into something like that.

But nonetheless, I think it would have made things work better for the President. I totally believe that part of the reason my job got structured the way it did—In addition to Clinton's wanting to keep me around and wanting to hush the women's constituencies, there was an underappreciation for the role of the press. This is an important job, and you don't just call someone the press secretary. It sends a signal of how important you think this is. The press secretary is somebody—in a way because George partly filled that role. But nonetheless, it did telegraph something that the press picked up on.

Then of course, to compound the problem, we closed the door. It was partly because George was playing a broader role than just press secretary and he was involved in a lot of sensitive discussions not as press secretary. The idea that the press secretary wouldn't be was part of the flawed thinking. So the decision was to keep people away from his office, but it wasn't George's idea, and George had a really bad feeling about it. From the first minute he said, "This is not a good idea."

During the transition there had been conversations. Jeff Eller had come up with the idea to move the entire press office out of the West Wing and into the OEOB [Old Executive Office Building], the whole working press section, and that got out somehow and the press went insane. I can't remember if it was broadly leaked or just something just floating around. That idea was mercifully torpedoed, but the door closing created a tremendous amount of bad will.

Freedman: Whose idea—

Myers: I'm pretty sure it was Mrs. Clinton's, and maybe Susan's. I don't know. But the two of them together cooked it up.

Freedman: Why?

Myers: Because they didn't trust the press and they were sure that reporters would be trying to read documents on George's desk upside-down or something. Or they didn't want reporters walking around the West Wing, which, by the way, is not something that really happens. They're always escorted.

Freedman: So was there a fight first, or was it clear that this was another hill?

Myers: I think it was a decision handed down in a way that there was no opportunity for appeal.

Riley: Was it ever contemplated that Susan would have an official role in the White House?

Myers: I don't know. I don't remember.

Riley: She was involved in the transition. There were a fairly large number of people in the early stages who were unofficially there. The Thomasons, at least Harry Thomason, was—

Myers: Yes.

Riley: Temporary passes or something like that. So I guess there was an assumption that those folks would continue to have an informal role.

Myers: Yes, and I think Susan probably fell into that category. I don't know why she didn't want a role. She had a young child, a husband in New York—I don't remember why.

Nelson: It sounds like she had, in some ways, authority without responsibility.

Myers: Exactly. And I think there are a lot worse things than being one of the best friends of the powerful First Lady, having access to all the good stuff about being President without having to

deal with the nonsense, the hard stuff. Not that she wasn't willing to do hard stuff, because I think she was extremely loyal and I think she worked really hard, and I think she was a pretty good scheduler. She did stabilize that operation in a lot of ways. But I don't know how the decision was made to put her in charge of personnel planning for the transition. It was obviously something that Hillary and the President felt comfortable with.

Riley: We hear a fair amount in other interviews about the difficulties in meeting the President's campaign pledge to reduce White House staff by 25 percent. Did that have any effect on your enterprise at all?

Myers: I don't remember whether I lost a body, but I certainly got beaten up about it on a regular basis. Ann Devroy from the *Washington Post* was one of the people who thought it was a dumb idea to begin with and was determined to make us eat our hats about it. She was going to serve that up on a big old platter. She was constantly wanting to know how we were—To her credit—Ann passed away probably eight or ten years ago now, it's hard to believe—she was the toughest reporter in the room, but she also believed that people who worked in the bureaucracies were good people who were working hard, that they were patriots.

I don't know what her politics were, and I don't care. She made my life really difficult in a lot of ways. She was unfair to me in a lot of ways, but I always respected her. I think that her view about it all was honorable and that she conducted herself mostly honorably. If I'd call her up, as bad as the relationship was at certain points, and say, "You got this wrong," she'd say, "Oh, my gosh, tell me why it's wrong." It wasn't defensive, it wasn't, "What do you mean it's wrong? *You're* wrong, shut up." That's what you get from a lot of reporters. Instead it was, "Tell me how it's wrong. Do we need to do a correction on this? How can I fix it?" That went a long way toward earning my respect for her, because she really worked hard to get it right. But anyway, she was going to make us eat that pledge.

I can't remember now how we cobbled together, then, this allegation. Who cares? Did one person vote for us because we were going to reduce the size of the office of the—And the first question was, How are you defining the universe? Is it the White House staff? Is it the Executive Office of the President? So of course we defined it as broadly as we could. Then you cut all these people and you borrow detailees from other departments. Ann was all over that. She was on top of that.

Nelson: She'd seen it before.

Myers: Oh, she'd seen it before and she'd seen—Here comes this new group that thinks the old guys didn't—Whatever mistakes they made, it wasn't this kind of stuff that they were doing wrong, and it wasn't because there were too many people, GS10s making $60,000 a year in the Office of Management and Budget. That just wasn't the problem.

Nelson: Can you give us a Bruce Lindsey update? You talked about him during the campaign. During the transition and the earliest days in the administration?

Myers: He became the personnel director. I didn't see him much. It's funny, I don't remember when he went to the counsel's office, but—

Riley: I think that's a year in or longer. It didn't happen right away.

Myers: My memory is that when he was doing that personnel job, I never really saw him. He disappeared into the personnel office. It was funny. Then he reappeared—That's my memory, the black hole.

Riley: That doesn't illuminate much, does it?

Myers: Does that answer all the nuances of your question? He was in there. There are always a lot of vacancies throughout the Executive Office of the President, all those political appointees, and so Bruce was churning out appointees. I don't know what he did during the transition. I can't remember. I think he was doing some vetting, or overseeing some of the vetting process. I did see him more during the transition before he disappeared.

Nelson: If he's given an assignment, a line responsibility to handle hiring, that means he has less time, I guess, to do what he'd been doing before, which is essentially to be with Clinton. But since you didn't see him—

Myers: I don't know. That's my sense. I guess he was no longer traveling. I'm sure Clinton put Bruce in personnel for a reason, to make sure that all the people that he wanted taken care of would be taken care of, because Bruce knew who they were, and that was important to Clinton.

Riley: Were you surprised at the Chief of Staff appointment?

Myers: Yes. I was surprised. I didn't really know Mack [McLarty]. I met him a few times. He didn't have a résumé that would suggest that that made sense. He was a very successful businessman in Arkansas. He seemed like a nice guy, someone the President had confidence in. But I was definitely surprised.

Riley: Were there other appointments that surprised you, maybe not equally so? You're coming out of a campaign, and it's very difficult for there to be a great deal of cohesion among people who had come through the wars and had been in the trenches with one another. Now you're beginning to see a situation in which the government is being staffed up, sometimes with some of your colleagues in arms, but also with a lot of newcomers. Is there concern about the whole enterprise getting hijacked?

Myers: No, quite the contrary. Clinton's first appointments, his economic team—Secretary [Lloyd] Bentsen, Senator Bentsen, came in. I knew him a little from '88. Then Bob Rubin, who'd been around; and Bob Reich, and who else—was Mickey Kantor part of that original announcement as USTR [U.S. Trade Representative]? No, that was foreign policy. But like so many of the people who actually ended up being—Laura Tyson was new, but she seemed excited. I met her, thought she seemed really great, and I was excited about the possibility of a woman in a senior position like that.

Then foreign policy was Tony Lake, Sandy Berger, and Mickey Kantor, and David Wilhelm to the DNC and Warren Christopher as Secretary of State. So the people who were being appointed were in many ways people that I thought deserved to be in those jobs. Then the White House staff was largely made up of my friends. It was Rahm, George, and Ricki Seidman, and people I

had worked closely with throughout the campaign, and Mark Gearan as Deputy Chief of Staff. So mostly I saw my friends, and obviously we knew we were going to have to expand beyond that. Most of the people I saw coming in were people I was excited to get to know better. No, I didn't feel—We probably should have been more hijacked, in hindsight.

Clinton has said since, and I think he's right, he spent way too much time on the Cabinet and not nearly enough time on the White House staff. The White House staff would clearly come to affect the day-to-day operation of his Presidency much more profoundly, especially in the beginning. If he'd put as much energy into the structure of the staff and individual appointments and thought that through with the same discipline he thought about the Cabinet, I think the first couple of years would have been different.

Riley: What do you remember about how gays in the military evolved and got so prominently placed?

Myers: My memory is weird on this, because I think it's wrong. I remember he had made the pledge at a fund-raiser months earlier, right? I can't remember exactly what John Harris said, but I know that it conflicted with—I've never gone back to check this. I remember being in Arkansas and having a team of *New York Times* reporters come to interview President-elect Clinton. It was Tom Freedman, Gwen Iffel, probably Mike Kelly. There were four people—probably Andy Rosenthal. I can't remember who they all were, but there were four, definitely Gwen and Freedman. Somebody at that interview asked about the gays in the military pledge. My recollection is that it led the paper the next day. I was surprised that out of this long interview—I totally missed the political significance of what was coming. But John reported that Andrea Mitchell had reported it. So I don't know why I—

Nelson: Did she ask him the question?

Myers: Maybe that's why the *Times* people asked about it.

Riley: During the transition?

Myers: Yes.

Riley: I have a vague recollection that there was a court decision that came down at some point here, but I haven't gone back and checked that in a while, and it comes up infrequently during these discussions—

Myers: That I don't remember.

Riley: I question my own memory at this point, but I thought there had been a judicial decision about the issue.

Freedman: So then what happened? They write about it; Andrea Mitchell reports it—

Myers: Then it becomes a story, which was right before we left Little Rock for Washington. Just something that dogged him, because he said yes, that was what he was going to do. I guess he was going to try to make it. Then Congress got involved; the Republicans got involved. I don't

remember exactly what the timeline was, but it was pretty clear the Republicans in Congress were going to beat us over the head with this for a while. Of course the reaction in the country was pretty swift and pretty surprised. It was not a popular idea, certainly not in the military, either.

Then there was that whole thing—First of all, he's a draft dodger; now he's going to let gays on the boat with you. So it was just coming at you. Here you are; you've got this whole Military Establishment around you as President. I suspect that it didn't help his relationship with the Secret Service. Many of these guys were former military; the culture is very similar.

There were people who were suspicious of it in our party—the Sam Nunns of the world. Then there was this effort in Congress to try to codify it. They were going to attach it to Clinton's first bill. Clinton created the commission to go figure it out and it came back with "Don't ask, don't tell," which was a Solomonic decision. No one was happy with it, and it turns out not to have worked well in practice, either. So yes, whatever planning there had been, it was just one of those things that took over, and there was no stopping the train.

Riley: Did you have any sense that you had a honeymoon with the press?

Myers: None. Are you kidding? The second day was the Attorney General disaster, and then this was already perking along. No honeymoon whatsoever. The honeymoon was the campaign. Then there was this revisionist thing among a lot of reporters, which is that he got off really easy during the campaign; we're not going to let him get off as easy.

Plus the whole transition was unpleasant. I think the reporters were mad that they were stuck in Little Rock. Things like that make their lives unpleasant, and so they blame—Things weren't handled perfectly. But they were stuck in Little Rock, and they didn't want to be there. They still talk about how they were stuck in Little Rock, nowhere to eat. Well, by God, go write some bad stories. [*laughter*] It's not quite that simple, but there was an element of that to it for sure.

Riley: You said you went to see Marlin Fitzwater at one point. Did you ever have a conversation with him or any of your predecessors as press secretary to prepare yourself for your job?

Myers: I talked a little bit to Jody Powell. I talked to Marlin—I didn't expect him to give me a lot of advice, although I did during the transition in the wake of the Gulf War. The no-fly zones in Iraq had been established. During the transition, the Iraqis started "painting" American patrol planes with radar, so we were bombing them. Marlin was really good about calling me and George to say this is what's happening, because Marlin is a great patriot. He said, "Look. This guy is President-elect. They're going to be asking questions as if he were the President, and you need to know." So he was really helpful. I always felt a debt of gratitude to him about that.

I talked to him a little, but I didn't expect him to give me advice at that point. I did call him, I can't remember how much later, sometime in the first year. I took him out to dinner. I was hoping he might say, "Hey, I've been watching. You're doing this wrong. You could do this better," or "Think about that." But he didn't really want to. He wasn't comfortable doing that. Now I know him so much better. We've given a lot of speeches together over the years. It's just not his way. You have to know him a lot better than I did, and I was hoping I could get some war stories out of him. He did a little of that. I could get him to talk a little bit about the reporters and

stories and stuff that happened, but he didn't really want to. He just wasn't in it. I think he was thinking he'd get grief from his colleagues for helping the enemy.

Riley: Was there anything in particular that you tried to do? Reading materials? You said a colleague volunteered to do a summary or synopsis. Maybe you were too busy?

Myers: Yes, that's definitely true. I wish I had made more time for it, especially during the transition, but I didn't know what my job was going to be. If I'd known on November 10, as opposed to January, if I'd had two months to think about it, I think I would have made an effort to hand off some of the day-to-day stuff and start thinking and planning, but I didn't have that luxury. Then the bad news is unfolding. So I didn't really feel as if I had a lot of time to step back and reflect about how to do things. I was just trying to get through the day.

Nelson: Can you explain what your job was? This was something new, a way of defining press secretary. What was the job as it was explained to you?

Myers: No one ever explained anything to me, Michael. I just assumed it was what my job as press secretary had always been, which had never included briefing, by the way. So my job was I did the morning briefing, which had been done. I guess Marlin did it, but he did it in his office. George didn't want to do it, so it fell to me.

I'd go down to the briefing room in the morning and do an update: Here's the President's schedule for the day. They'd say, "What's the speech about?" You give them some limited information. That tradition changed when I later moved. When we opened the door we'd do it upstairs, and when I was eventually promoted and moved into the bigger office, we'd do it in the bigger office. It was a very helpful thing. In that morning briefing you not only gave them a little bit of information; they gave you a lot of information.

They'd say, "Did you see the story—" I'd see a story and think, *Hmm, that's interesting*. And then I'd go into the briefing room and there'd be a lot of energy around it, "What's this?" This is upset, I could tell. *Oh, I'd better go back and rethink this.* By the end of that, I always had a pretty good sense for what questions I was going to get if I was briefing. A little earlier, I probably had a good sense about what George was going to get and could help him prepare a little bit.

Nelson: What time would you do this?

Myers: About 9:00.

Freedman: What time would you get there?

Myers: Usually between 7:00 and 7:30. I'd try to read the papers at home and get in. The meeting schedule changed weekly. It changed about three or four times in the two years that I was there, but I think at one point we had a 7:00 staff meeting and then it moved to 7:30. Depending on what was happening, if I wanted to watch the morning shows, sometimes I'd get there earlier to watch them in my office. Then I found out that if the guys were on the lawn at 7:00 doing their little stand-ups and they'd see me in my office, they'd come in and want to chat and have a cup of coffee. I realized I'd better go someplace else if I wanted to get any work

done. It was a pretty long day. If I got out by 8:30, that was a good day, a short day. I could handle that.

Nelson: Five days a week, six days a week.

Myers: I worked every Saturday, especially in the beginning. I tried not to work Sundays, but the Clintons did a lot of traveling and stuff would happen. There was always something going on. It's impossible for the staff not to work if the President is working, because first of all, there's the culture of, "Oh, everyone's in the office." Then he's generating stuff all the time. Keeping up with him was not easy. This was an administration that really wanted to *do*. One of the criticisms, fairly, is that he wanted to do too much in those first years. But we were pretty busy.

So back to your question of what my job was. I was managing the day-to-day needs of the press, starting with the morning briefing, providing information for them, helping George prepare for briefings, helping prepare strategically for trips, working with the communications people about longer-term planning. There were a lot of longer-term meetings, trying to figure out—just being able to answer questions, even though I wasn't the briefer—being able to answer questions about whatever we were working on, the range of policy stuff—and preparing myself on some level in those early months.

I did do the morning thing and I was on call, was expected to have information even if I wasn't the person standing behind the podium. So it's easier. It's also harder, because when you have an apparatus that's preparing you for the briefing, people are much more focused on making sure you know stuff. Then, when [David] Gergen came—When the whole thing happened in May, that was a weird time. We were in Philadelphia, I think.

Gergen was there, and he and Andrea Mitchell—Andrea was always picking up some little buzz. So Andrea comes to me and says, "There's something going on. There's George. There's going to be a staff change or something." That was the first I heard of it. I knew enough not to dismiss this. So I went to Gergen and said, "What's going on?" He said, "I can't tell you right now, but I'll tell you in a little while." Typical Gergen. "It's too important. I'll tell you in a little while."

A while later he said, "There's going to be an announcement tomorrow." I think he told me sometime in that evening. "There's going to be a staff change and George is going to be moved." No, I'm getting confused here. This was the Gergen appointment. He didn't tell me because he wasn't there.

Nelson: He came at the end of May.

Myers: No, this was the day before the Saturday when the Gergen thing was announced.
Freedman: According to our timeline, Gergen's announcement on May 29—

Myers: Right. It was Memorial Day weekend.

Freedman: Then it's not until the first week of June that the announcement comes that Gergen's going to replace Stephanopoulos.

Myers: That was just a couple of days later. But I'm trying to remember who told me. Maybe it was Bruce. I have a picture that I know is from that day, and it's Bob McNeely, the White House photographer, going like this [gesturing]—Andrew Friendly's the person going like this, and I'm going like this, and Clinton took it. He was in the elevator. He took McNeely's camera off of his neck. We were joking around and he took the picture, but it's from that day.

Riley: That's "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil."

Myers: Exactly. Anyway, somebody told me. I got back to Washington and I don't know how much I was told. I knew that George was being moved into a different job and that David Gergen was coming in. It was pretty unclear and I was very upset by it, just because I thought George had been such a loyal foot soldier and it was being done in a weird way that was going to humiliate George. Then to bring in a guy who was a Republican—

Riley: Not to revise the story, but in your earlier account, Wolf Blitzer does that.

Myers: Maybe both of them. It's funny. Now I'm thinking Andrea, but I said Wolf.

Riley: [reading] "Wolf Blitzer came up to me. It was Friday night. We were I think in Philadelphia with the President, and Wolf Blitzer came up to me and said, 'Hey, I hear David Gergen is coming in—'"

Myers: That's funny. That was five years ago. I guess I'm thinking Andrea is the one who did the travel office. Yes, now that you say that; I think that's right.

Nelson: Did you wonder if she would pick things up through her husband's social network?

Myers: I assumed she would. Are you kidding? I knew she would.

Nelson: That's why she knew things before you did or sometimes seemed to know things before you did.

Myers: She was a good reporter. The travel office thing she certainly didn't get from them. She got that from somebody inside the White House.

Nelson: I was just thinking about how concerned Clinton was to propitiate Alan Greenspan during that first—

Myers: I don't think that was a big concern. She certainly knew what the Republicans in Congress were thinking, for example, but I don't think that that gave her proprietary information that she used. Alan's world is a little off what she covers. There's a lot of overlap. She goes for a different kind of story. But anyway, then Gergen came and George went off for the weekend. I don't remember whose office was where. Gergen was operating out of George's office, I think, because George was gone.

Mark ultimately moved into that office, but I remember being in our office suite and Gergen—We'd gone to West Point that day, so the announcement was made like at 7:30, a ridiculous hour, and it was all dressed up as if, "Oh, isn't this great—" blah, blah, blah. So we go off to West

Point or Annapolis. West Point, I think. And Mack—I was really upset—and the Vice President—

It was a very funny moment, actually. I haven't thought about this in so long. Seven o'clock in the morning we're all in the Vice President's office, for whatever reason, maybe the Chief of Staff's office. Anyway, the Vice President is sitting there at the word processor, writing the press release or doing something, and he's saying, "OK, so, David Gergen—" He made some joke about himself. "So-and-So will be filling in as Vice President." Everyone cracked up. Andrew Friendly would become Vice President, and it was very funny and it broke the tension. Then he could see I was upset, so he said, "Come on." He took me down to his ceremonial office and said, "Don't worry. It's going to be OK."

I wasn't so much concerned about myself. I just was really angry at what I thought was the unfair treatment of George. He said, "You know, it's going to be OK." Then we were at West Point. I remember Mack McLarty called me, so I called him back and he said, "Don't worry about yourself. This is going to be OK." I was completely suspicious, so I got back to the White House that afternoon, and Gergen said, "I want to talk to you." He said, and I think it was that day and that moment, "I assume you'll be doing the briefings." I was pretty sure he hadn't talked to anybody about that, but I said, "OK." I don't think there was a conversation about it. That's my suspicion. I don't know; I never asked. It moved so fast after that, and Gergen started telling people that was what it was going to be.

I think he assumed that everyone assumed that that was what was going to happen. I should ask him, because I never have, where that decision came from. But he said, "I assume you'll be doing the briefings." And I said, "OK." I acted like, "Sure, of course I will." So I started doing the briefings. Gergen was extremely helpful in a lot of ways. I remember preparing for our first G7 [Group of 7: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States] summit, which was in Tokyo that year, and how much Gergen's experience was crucial to us getting through that.

It wasn't a great summit, but it was far from a disaster, and none of the other staff doing most of the day-to-day work had ever been on a summit. Sandy and Tony knew something about it, but they hadn't planned a communications strategy around this. And how do you introduce a new President to his peers in the world? For somebody who is considered not to have any foreign policy experience, how do you structure this and what do you try to get out of it? What's the rhythm of it and what are the times you've got, and you brief him? What do you try to accomplish at those briefings and what are the obstacles that you're getting in terms of what the other countries will be saying about the discussions? None of us really had any context for thinking about that.

So that was when I thought, *OK, this is helpful in ways.* But I think what that dynamic sealed for me was, you had Gergen, who had a tremendous amount of experience and initially had a lot of Clinton's confidence, because he was a guy who had been through it before. Then there was George, who was also still close to Clinton. George was probably not the right person to be out front. He wasn't particularly good at briefing because he didn't tell them anything and he didn't have a way of telling them nothing and making them feel good about learning nothing. But he was still a key player with the press.

Then Mark was the communications director. So there were four people with overlapping responsibilities. Ultimately what happened to me was if Gergen knew or if George knew, if George and Gergen knew, or if Gergen and Mark knew, everyone assumed I knew, and I didn't. So I constantly had to try to figure out what other people knew that I was expected to know that I didn't know. People were constantly saying, "I told Gergen about this two days ago." I'd say, "Well, it didn't get down to me." So that was a very frustrating situation for me.

Then I'd go out to brief, and basically Gergen would have told something to a reporter that he didn't tell to me. I never believed it was malicious, but it had a very destructive effect.

Riley: That's not something that could have been fixed organizationally so that you got half an hour with Gergen in the morning to—?

Myers: Theoretically it could have been fixed organizationally, but no, it was hard.

Riley: Because the time is too constricted or because he's just not inclined to want to handle it, formal line responsibility—

Myers: I think Gergen tried, but his nature and the nature of the Clinton White House, which was that things were always happening—There was more structure as time went on, which I think served everybody better, but at that time I tried. Even if you did spend some time with him in the morning, by two o'clock in the afternoon something had already passed by—"Whoops, sorry. I forgot." Again, I don't think it was intentional on anybody's part.

I always thought Gergen was pretty good to me, although I think he did leak too, in ways that were undermining to me. George I always believed was on my side, to the degree that he was trying to protect his own interests as well, and Mark the same thing. They are people who remain friends. There needed to be one communications director and one press secretary, and that just wasn't happening at that point.

Then it was that summer that the Baghdad bombing thing happened. I think that was June 27, if that's possible. I don't know why that date sticks in my mind. It's probably wrong.

Freedman: You know what? I think that's right.

Myers: It was the worst day.

Riley: It occurs on June 26.

Myers: The bombing was Saturday, June 26. What happened was, when President Bush was visiting Kuwait to celebrate the second anniversary of the liberation or something—I believe that had been in January—there was an attempt on his life. A car bomb was foiled. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] suspected that Saddam [Hussein] was behind it. They launched an investigation. Of course I was asked about this at a briefing, and about the guidance that had been developed. I don't remember exactly in what context, "The FBI is investigating this. When they have reached a conclusion, they'll forward it to the President, and he'll make a decision." And periodically I'd get asked the question and I'd give the same guidance.

So one Friday I actually did check with the NSC. I didn't check with Tony. It wouldn't have made any difference, but the guy, Don Steinberg, who was the deputy, reported both to Tony and to me—a good guy—said, "Yes, guidance is still the same on that." So I was asked the question, which I was asked one day out of five, and gave the same answer.

Well, unbeknownst to me, Clinton had actually gotten the FBI's recommendations or conclusions on Wednesday, which were that Saddam had been responsible for the bombing. So he was in the process of deciding what to do. I didn't know that.

The next day was a Saturday. I came in and Gergen said, "You need to be back here at three o'clock." Saturdays were kind of casual. He said something like, "You need to be dressed up." I said, "What? Is there a surprise party?" I tried to get a little more information out of him, but I couldn't, so I came back. I don't remember the exact timing, but I went to see him and he told me what had happened. I said, "I told them yesterday—" I don't remember if he knew. He said, "Once we get confirmation that the bombs have landed—not a BDA, bomb damage assessment, but just confirmation that the bombs have landed—we're going to announce it."

But it wasn't exactly that, just confirmation from the Navy that there were 22 or 24 Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from a ship in the Gulf. That was a couple of hours hence. I think they were expecting that at maybe six or seven o'clock, and there was nothing going on. I don't remember exactly what the circumstances were. He said, "You can't tell anybody."

So the time came, and the press is hanging around. I can't remember exactly why we did this. Dave Leavy came to me. I wish Dave was here to help me remember this. "Is anything else going to happen today?" What do you say? Can I put a lid on? I decided, "Yes." If we do anything else, then we're going to make them very suspicious, which in hindsight probably would have been better. So anyway off they all went and two hours later we paged them and said, "You've got to come back to the White House."

Obviously the first round of stories was that this had happened, then the next day—maybe it was Sunday—John Gehl from the *New York Times* said, "You know, on Friday you said this, and on Saturday you put a lid on." And that became obviously a big part of the story. I was really mad about it.

In many ways it was my fault. I set the guidance up in a way that was flawed, which I realize in hindsight. What I should have said was, "The FBI is looking into this. When they reach a conclusion they'll forward it to the President. In the meantime, I'm not going to say anything more. When we have something else to report on that, I'll let you know, and in the meantime that's the guidance. Do it the way you will."

Every time I got asked the question, I would have said, "As I said before, I'm not going to have anything to say about that until we have something to say about that." That would have protected me, but I didn't, and once I got down that track I was trapped, because to say anything else would have tipped off—and Tony said, "We thought about letting you know, but then how do you answer the question?" It was a mistake that again I made—I'd been briefing for a month, or not even a month.

So I did go to Tony and to the President and I said, "This is not good for you; it's not good for me. You can't let this happen." I felt that I needed to have that conversation. The President just nodded; he didn't really say a lot. But he did say, "I feel bad about it and I'm sorry you got caught in that." I needed to be able to go back and say, "Yes, I've talked to the President about this and things are going to change." Tony, to his credit, really did work hard after that to try to make sure that—It was bad for everybody, but it was especially embarrassing and it was undermining to me at a time when I didn't need any help being undermined. I had plenty of that going on around me as it already was. It ebbed and flowed after that. That was a hard summer.

Riley: You never had any problems with direct access to the President?

Myers: Not really, no.

Riley: It was more a question of being out of the loop when decisions were being taken that you were being asked to comment on?

Myers: Right, because there were three other people in overlapping roles. The first year, pretty much the FTD [Florists' Transworld Delivery] guy had access to the Oval Office. That's not quite true, but there was a familiarity from the campaign that in many ways—I remember George asking Clinton right around that inaugural day, maybe even on the morning of the inauguration, "What do you want us to call you?" So many of Reagan's aides, the close ones, called him "Governor." He said, "I think 'Mr. President' will do." I said, "OK."

I hadn't really thought about what you call him when he's the President. In hindsight it's so obvious, and Clinton was so right to do the obvious, which is he wanted the staff to call him "Mr. President." But at the time there had been so much familiarity and informality in the campaign culture.

Nelson: What did you call him on the road?

Myers: "Governor." Other people called him "Bill." I didn't, for the same reason. He was the Governor and I had known him only—I didn't come out of the Arkansas group, and it was just easier.

Nelson: So there were people who went from calling him "Bill" to calling him—

Myers: Bruce still called him "Bill" when they were in private, but in public he called him "Mr. President." He'd always been "Bill" before that. When you meet him and he's already President, it's easy, but when he's been "Bill" to you for 20 years and all of a sudden he's "Mr. President," it takes a little getting used to for everybody, I think. He always would sign his notes, or he'd call you, "Hi, it's Bill." He wouldn't say, "Hi, it's the President." He'd say, "Hi, it's Bill."

Nelson: And you'd say, "Hey, Bill."

Myers: Yes, "Yo, Bill." So anyway, that wasn't really the issue. There were areas where I had better information than others, and foreign policy ebbed and flowed as a problem for me. It was always troubling around the personal issues like Whitewater. But that was hard for everybody.

Riley: The Clintons themselves would shield that information, right? They didn't let a lot of people in on what was going on.

Myers: Right.

Riley: That was mostly Bruce and then people in the counsel's office? I guess John Podesta gets a brief for some of this fairly early.

Myers: Yes. It wasn't something that traditionally would fall under the purview of the staff secretary, but also I think it's his black sense of humor that kept everyone from going crazy. Then there were the outside lawyers, too. There was David Kendall and Barnett to a certain degree, and other people who had a piece of it. I never knew—then Mark Fabiani came in and was managing it. Then after I left there were a ton of people who had a part of it.

Riley: There were a lot of stories coming out early on about the informality of the White House culture. I wonder if you could comment on that a little bit, particularly as it related to the way the permanent White House staff reacted to handling this new group of people coming in. We've got about 10 more minutes before we break for lunch.

Myers: As I said, first of all, that's Clinton's personality. He's an informal person by nature. Arkansas was a slightly less formal place. He's younger, so he was closer in age to the people who worked for him than a lot of Presidents. It's generational. It's the age similarities; it's the informality of his previous life. I just think that was the culture. It was just a younger group of people with different expectations.

I think we were insensitive to how that would be perceived by not just the permanent White House staff, but the Washington establishment and the country. I think it was a mistake not to have a more formal dress code. I think there was too much emphasis on the youth thing. Yes, I was young. George, Begala, Rahm—but Tony Lake was 55, Lloyd Bentsen was 72, Bob Rubin was, I don't know, 55. People who were in the really senior—Carol Rasco was in her 50s.

Nelson: Gore.

Myers: Gore was young, but not that young. Mack was 48 or so. Most of the people were the same age as all their predecessors had been in the same positions. But there were a couple of public people, like myself, who were young. Then people who have always been young got lumped into that too. The press aides were always young. Go to the Bush White House; they're all 25. The personal aide, he's 24. Blake, Blain—whatever his preppy name [Blake Gottesman], Jenna's high school boyfriend. But we all got lumped together.

Riley: How did you dress when you went to work? Did you wear jeans?

Myers: On Saturdays I sometimes did, and I think that was a mistake. I think we should not have. The other thing is, I wore pants suits, which is what I had worn. Particularly traveling, I prefer to wear pants. Apparently the Reagan and Bush White House women weren't allowed to wear pants, and I didn't know that. So coming in on Day One in a pants suit was—It seems silly—

Nelson: You raise an eyebrow, but whose eyebrows were raised? The permanent staff at the White House? The press?

Myers: I think a lot of the Washington establishment types, people who had been in the previous White House. I didn't run up against the permanent staff so much, but maybe. I heard about it a little bit from the press. They didn't have an opinion about it. They could have cared less.

Riley: Fashion is not the strong suit of the press corps.

Myers: That's for sure.

Riley: Maybe present family excluded for—

Myers: No, he's a bow-tie guy. That's as much of a fashion statement—not always, but it's a world of bad shoes down in that briefing room. It's more of an observation on their part than a value judgment. But it's like, "I guess you women can wear pants now." "What do you mean?" "They couldn't wear pants." If I had to do over again, I would have established some very simple, but clear, guidelines. No jeans. Coats and ties in the Oval Office, just things I think would have created the perception, the reality, of the idea that it's special when you walk in here. You don't go in in jeans.

Riley: The President himself is showing up in sweat clothing in off-hours.

Myers: Sometimes, yes, he'd come over on Saturday to do a couple of hours of paperwork. He might come in in sweats. I don't know if he did it at the end. I wonder. I think we misread the symbolism of it early on.

Then there were all the stories about the conflict between the Clintons and the permanent staff and the stories like the lamp-throwing story. Who knows if that was true? But that kind of stuff got out, and that really upset them.

Nelson: Who knows it was true? Surely you were asked.

Myers: I probably denied it; I don't know. I'm sure Mrs. Clinton said she didn't throw a lamp at him. I have no idea. I'm sure that's true. I'd have to go back and look. Actually, it was a 17th-century lamp that had been in Thomas Jefferson's family when they came to Virginia in the 1650s. Not the kind of thing that one can admit to. I have no idea if it's true. I always assumed it wasn't true, but that something had happened.

Riley: How long did it take you to develop a real comfort level in that briefing job? You're seated here at the table, you make a very funny joke about this, and sometimes that's the greatest way to disarm a questioner.

Myers: Absolutely was.

Riley: But boy, it takes a lot of confidence to be able to do that.

Myers: I already had a comfort level with the people in that room and a comfort level with tough questions, and a certain sense—I probably lean too far into it—of what I could get away with in terms of making a wisecrack to change the tone, disarm, take the sting out of a line of questioning. Whether you're doing that behind the podium or doing it in a gaggle or in a scrum on the tarmac at some airport, I had had a lot of the back-and-forth. What I had to get used to was, when you step behind that podium, the relationship does change and the standard of accountability changes. You can get away with being a little bit wrong in a less formal setting. In that formal setting I had to learn that there's really no margin for error. I also had to learn that the reporters do posture a lot more.

Nelson: For one another, for cameras, or for you?

Myers: All of the above. It's part of the culture of the room. I don't think it's any one of those things exclusively. I think it's all of the above. It's what you do. Everybody gets their game face on a little bit when they're in there. The lights—part of it may be that they're going to be seen on TV, but that's not exactly what it is. It's a little bit of that; it's a little bit of everything. It's just the culture of the room. So I had to learn that. There's no class. Even Gergen, who had briefed, never helped me create a process to prepare myself. I had to figure that out for myself. I really felt that I never got it right until the end, and even then it was just a lot better by then. For the last month I felt I was getting it, but by then a lot of things had changed.

Mark Gearan had moved. He was still communications director, but he moved downstairs. I moved into the big office. Part of my deal with Leon [Panetta], which I'm sure we'll get to, was you've got to let me in the meetings. It's not enough to have Gergen in the room, or George; I have to be in the room. Leon had created a small meeting in the morning. There were maybe a dozen people in it instead of a hundred. So many of the meetings in the early Clinton days were big. A lot of business got done at that meeting.

I had worked out some stuff with Tony Lake so that I felt I was getting better access to foreign policy information, and I felt for the first time I was really starting to be in many of the places that I needed to be and the information was coming to me. But by then I was already on my way out the door. I got comfortable with the culture relatively quickly, but I didn't feel like I had the support that I needed for a long time in terms of preparing me. So that was hard.

Riley: Why don't we break for lunch now? We've made very good progress.

[BREAK]

Riley: If you need a break at some point, let me know. I don't know that we want to stay strictly wedded to the chronology for the next couple of hours, so feel free to go through your mental index and see where the crucial areas were that you really wanted to deal with. I wanted to lead off with one general question, and it is to ask if during your time as press secretary you had any dealings with Howell Raines. Then I would like to get your reading on Raines's relationship with this White House.

Myers: Howell left Washington around the time that we came. He'd been Washington bureau chief for the *Times*, then of course became editorial page editor. I didn't really have many dealings with him. I had many more dealings subsequent to that because I'm married to a *Times*

reporter who had worked for Howell in the Washington bureau and was friendly with him. I've talked to him subsequently. Certainly the Clinton White House felt he was quite hostile to them. His view is, "What? Me hostile to the Clintons? I don't understand where that comes from. I was only tough on him when he deserved it. No, not me." He said, "I understand that there was a theory it was two southern guys and the town was only big enough for one or something." I said, "Yes, that was a theory." He says, "I don't understand where that comes from." I said, "Maybe you should start by reading the collected works of Howell Raines."

Nelson: Nineteen ninety-three and forward.

Myers: Exactly. I think George Bush is proof. I don't think editorial content has that much real effect on—maybe it's been diminished a lot, because as I talked about yesterday, this era of red media and blue media and people choosing up sides. Howell was tough on us; so was everybody in those first two years. I didn't think he was particularly tough. I think as time went on there were times when people expected him to lighten up and it didn't happen, but I was gone by then. I stopped reading a lot of it because it was just so predictable.

I read the *Times* news coverage very closely, but not so much the editorial coverage. Although I like reading editorials, I didn't read that closely. But there was concern about it. At a certain point Bill Clinton just assumed that this northeastern newspaper was never going to give him his due, even though the guy in charge was a southerner.

Riley: Did he blow off steam to you about the coverage he was getting?

Myers: Occasionally. I don't remember specifically. Certainly it seems possible that he talked about Howell Raines. My impression is that it bothered him, but at the same time, he was of two minds about it. Nobody likes to be criticized, and all Presidents are sensitive to it in their own way. Clinton had a difficult relationship with the media. I think all Presidents do in whatever way it reflects their personality and their pasts.

He'd complain regularly about the press being hard on him or this piece or that piece. Certain things were predictable, certain kinds of criticism he would get upset about, and other times I'd think he might get upset about something and he wouldn't. Or I wouldn't see it coming and he'd get upset about something. So for me it wasn't completely predictable.

Nelson: Reading this John Harris book, when he's talking about the Vince Foster suicide, he said that on the night Clinton found out, without telling the Secret Service, he went over to the Foster home, and it was the only time he did that. Did Clinton—

Myers: He did tell the Secret Service, because the Secret Service drove him over. He didn't tell the press. There was no press pool.

Nelson: I guess what I'm getting at here, and maybe this was not the right example, but to what extent did Clinton feel restricted by the Secret Service? Meaning that ordinarily—and this was what I was reading in Harris—to decide to go somewhere and do something on the spur of the moment was impossible, because all this logistical preparation has to be done. Did he feel he was hemmed in the White House in ways that made him feel cut off?

Myers: Yes, in the beginning in particular. You get used to it after a certain period. I think he always chafed a little bit, but in the early months he couldn't go out and jog without creating a big brouhaha. Then they built the track. Remember that episode? They built the little track inside the fence, which I don't think he ever used, because running around a little loop, like the rat on the wheel with people walking by down on the ellipse was just not his idea of a good time.

I remember him once saying, "You can't just go out to dinner." You can, but you can't. You figure out ways to make it a little more flexible, but it's never going to be flexible.

Freedman: He went to McDonald's.

Myers: I think that he went to McDonald's once during the transition and never—

Freedman: That was it?

Myers: Never went to McDonald's again. He did go in Arkansas, but the whole McDonald's thing was like a *Saturday Night Live* more than it was reality. And eating fries off people's plates, that part's true. [*laughter*]

Freedman: Is that right?

Myers: Clinton was known to help himself to your food if he wanted it, and it was fine with me. I'm not a person who'd be at all bothered by that. It was kind of amusing. But yes, occasionally he'd do that. But he'd say, "I can't walk down the street and go shopping with Chelsea." They did go Christmas shopping one year. They must have taken a pool, but it was a last-minute thing. I don't remember where they went, but it was a complete nightmare. They tried to go to a bookstore to get a book for Hillary or something. First of all, the press is in there recording what you're buying, so it's hard to keep it a secret from the person for whom it's intended.

It's exciting for the city whenever the President is out and about, but it's not exactly practical for the President. They figured out how to go out to dinner. To a certain degree, the whole idea is you put a lid on. The press pool would have to be sitting around until there was a lid. So if the President was thinking, *Maybe we'll go out to dinner tonight*, the press had to sit around. They complain about that, which the President was completely unsympathetic about and he shouldn't have been. You don't want to do that gratuitously, but if the press is going to insist on coming with you, then they have to be willing to wait on the nights when you think maybe you're going to go out to dinner, which wasn't that many nights. The Clintons didn't go out to dinner in town that much.

But the night of Vince's death he said, "I'm not going to tell the pool. I just don't want them there." I thought that was perfectly fine.

Freedman: He drove out there with a Secret Service driver but no motorcade?

Myers: There were probably three cars, a lead and a tail. But there was definitely no press or staff van or anything. Mrs. Clinton wasn't there. She was in Arkansas. But somebody else, maybe it was Mickey, somebody like that. Somebody else went with him—Mack.

Riley: What was the atmosphere in the White House the few days after this?

Myers: Everyone was stunned. This all happened during the *Larry King* episode. It was personally shocking. Anyone who kills himself—it's always the last person that people think of, because it's such an unexpected thing. But Vince was the portrait of stability and rectitude, somebody who had always succeeded at everything he had done and if he had hung around I'm sure he would have succeeded as a counsel in Washington, because everyone had their turn in the barrel. He was having a particularly rough go of it, but stick around long enough, and everyone gets to ride over the falls. It's just the way it goes.

Of course I was shocked by the fact that it immediately became a conspiracy. If it happened now I wouldn't be, because that's the way it works. As kooky as it is, it's the way that it is. But I said things like, "Vince took his life. Suicide is mysterious, we'll never know." People wanted to interpret that as me creating the atmosphere of mystery around a person's death, which caught me completely by surprise. I was also mad about it. *You've got to be kidding me. He's gone. How will anyone ever know why he did it?* There was no note in the first few days, but even the note that he left didn't really explain it, not to the satisfaction of his family, that's for sure. So the way that that spun out of control and the way that it gave rise—

I do remember sitting in Mark Gearan's office late the night that he died. We had put out a statement and I said, "You know, I just have the weirdest feeling about this, that we're all going to look back someday and say it all started the night that Vince died. Something weird is going to happen." I don't think I look back and see that as the night, but certainly that was what gave Whitewater energy again after it had gone away for a little more than a year. Then it was the handling of the information from his files and the fact that there were Whitewater files in his office when he died, the unexplainable circumstances of his death. Then I think the explanations—That's where Whitewater came back.

Nelson: We also have this new—I don't know if you dealt with this at all as press secretary—powerful medium out there, conservative talk radio, which is becoming kind of a petri dish for every wild rumor. Was the *Washington Times* up and running when you were—

Myers: Yes.

Nelson: Anyway, there were things that previous press secretaries, especially in Democratic administrations, never had to think about. How did you adapt to that? Did you deal with Rush Limbaugh at all, or Gordon Liddy, or any of the other prominent talk radio people?

Myers: No. There's no dealing with them, although Clinton said something about Rush Limbaugh once and it became a little firestorm. He made some snippy comment about Rush, and of course that became a story in and of itself. I think we were on Air Force One and he was talking to the St. Louis radio 50,000-watt clear-channel. He made some comment about Rush Limbaugh and it became the story. We were supposed to talk about economic growth and it ended up being about Rush Limbaugh.

In terms of being aware of it and Clinton feeling frustrated by it, and feeling that there was no adequate alternative Democratic response, we were aware of that. It was just really becoming the

force that it has become, and obviously there was no cable television. There was CNN, but it wasn't the same.

Freedman: No Fox.

Myers: No Fox, no MSNBC, no CNBC. CNBC might have been in its nascent—but it wasn't anything anyone paid attention to for politics, a stock ticker, or whatever. So that medium wasn't out there either, and there was no Internet. So it was different.

Nelson: I wondered if there was somebody you gave responsibility to on the staff to be the press person who monitors and tries to connect with this powerful new medium.

Myers: Yes. We had a guy, Richard Rushfield. Richard was the radio guy. He was a great entrepreneur, a very young guy. He was really good. He knew the whole radio scene and he single-handedly tried to keep people from the administration on the radio all the time as a counter to the more powerful host-driven shows, which we couldn't compete with. He could make sure that where there were opportunities, where there were liberal hosts or small markets or new shows that wanted a voice from the administration, he was constantly coming in and trying to book time for me and everybody else. The guy was relentless and he did a good job.

There was a whole piece of the operation run by Jeff Eller that was directed toward, not necessarily radio—I think we called it "specialty media"—but it was local media and it was constituency media, African American press, Spanish-language press, whatever. There wasn't a lot of labor press, but any of those constituency kinds of media groups that might be opportunities for Clinton. That was becoming more sophisticated and I'm sure is something that's now done a lot on the Internet. It's much easier to monitor and pay attention to than it was. But that's why—This is completely off the topic—but why David Brock has created this operation, Media Matters, to monitor—There was no way to monitor what Rush Limbaugh said. We didn't have the resources to do it. Now they tape everything he says and a lot of these other talk shows and put it into a data bank and track it. The things they come up with every week are really interesting. There's no accountability. That's just true of the world in which we live, mediawise.

Nelson: Did other staff people, thinking now about the organization of your office, specialize in the way that Eller and Rushfield did in terms of what kind of media they—

Myers: Not really. I had a couple of different guys, Don Steinberg and then Calvin Mitchell, who handled national security questions. It was a little bit divided up. People did develop areas of more expertise than others. So if I wasn't answering the question, one of my assistants was going to answer it. It changed over time a little bit as issues changed. But one person would know more about—We had a health care person, Laurie McHugh, for a while. Different people handled it. So yes, we did it on an issue-by-issue basis, rather than a particular segment of the media world. That worked pretty well.

Normally, if I had had more time to put together a staff, I probably would have had somebody who specialized in economic issues. Then you have one person on foreign policy and one person could have done the rest of the domestic basket. But Clinton's folks on economics were so deep, particularly in that first year, it was really what he was interested in. [Bob] Woodward's book,

The Agenda, didn't give Clinton enough credit, but painted an even more chaotic picture than actually existed.

Freedman: To pick up with the episode of Foster's death, it's striking looking at these timelines, even that first year, but certainly the first two years, how many media firestorms, or at least focal points, you had to contend with. If you think across that whole time period—Foster's death, Waco, the World Trade Center, and then Ruth Bader Ginsburg and other nominees—and we're still only in 1993.

Myers: Don't forget the haircut. Let's not bury the most important—Travel office—

Freedman: Yes, the travel office. I guess, the question—

Myers: One damn thing after another.

Freedman: Each one of these things we could ask you questions and take an hour and I'd be tempted to do that, but let me ask you to survey them. What stands out in terms of those episodes? You mentioned the haircut. Was that the biggest challenge, the biggest headache, the biggest firestorm?

Myers: It was the most absurd. Talk about making an issue out of nothing. What happened was that Clinton was sitting on the tarmac in LA, and he got his hair cut. We sat there for a while, which was not completely unheard of in the Clinton White House. Clinton did something he never ever does. He walked back to the media area, the press cabin on the plane.

Freedman: After the trim.

Myers: So John King from AP goes, "Did he get his hair cut?" I said "Yes."

Freedman: He was asking, "Did he just get his hair cut?"

Myers: Yes, because they'd seen him half an hour before and he had different hair. So I said, "Yes." And John said, "I saw that guy with the long hair get off the back of the plane." I said, "Yes, that's Christophe." They'd seen it, what am I going to say? No one thinks anything of it. Then there's an erroneous statement. I guess somebody wrote a little ha-ha, isn't it funny Clinton got his hair cut—I'm sure it was John—on Air Force One. Then somebody from the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] said, "Air traffic was held up for an hour," which of course was never true. We're off to the races for that. Then this picture of this arrogant, drunk-with-power new President getting his hair cut while basic air travelers, hard-working Americans, are stranded—

Freedman: By the $200 haircut.

Myers: Then the whole thing becomes—This is the big mistake that I made. How much did they pay? Christophe charges $200 for a haircut. I said, "I don't know." I asked Mrs. Clinton, and she said, "We have a personal services contract with Christophe." So like an idiot I went out and repeated that. I didn't know what to say. How much did they pay a month?

The bottom line was Christophe cut the President's hair for free, OK? Big deal. I don't know if he did. Wouldn't you? You're a hair guy, plus he'd become friendly with the President because he was friends with the Thomasons. So he had cut Clinton's hair, Mrs. Clinton's hair, before. They asked, "Can you spare an hour to jump on Air Force One and cut the President's hair?" "You know what? I got a manicure at that time; I can't make it." So of course he came and he cut the President's hair. Who cares?

But people did care. I made it worse by repeating the personal services contract and the fact that we weren't able to—finally, after all of it, somebody was able to FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] the FAA or something, and the record shows that there was one commuter flight from Palmdale to Los Angeles, which is an hour away, which was, I think, held up for 10 minutes. That was the net result of all of that. So without the air traffic being held up, which nobody could really prove, it wasn't a story.

Nelson: Why did it become such a big story?

Myers: It was symbolic, in the same way of the first President Bush not knowing how scanners work, which of course was never really true. What it said was this young President is arrogant. He's willing to inconvenience people. He hangs around fancy Hollywood types. This is not the "Putting People First" President that we bargained for. And it was in the middle of when things weren't going so well.

Nelson: Is it partly that the press was tired of being kept waiting and waiting and waiting when Clinton does things on his own time, and so they latch on to this as an example that people can relate to?

Myers: Maybe.

Nelson: Self-indulgence, selfishness.

Myers: Probably.

Riley: But it also seems, as Michael's suggesting, another instance of the importance of creature comforts in the care and feeding of the press in terms of the kind of coverage that you're getting.

Myers: You think, *Oh, that shouldn't matter*. But they're human beings. We're probably flying back from LA to Washington. It was, in my memory, late afternoon, so that means now that people are sitting there for an hour. They're getting home at two o'clock in the morning. Yes, all that stuff plays into it. It wasn't the first time that they'd been kept waiting. I think the other thing is, you're kept waiting and you don't know why, and that's frustrating. Even on a commercial plane, you all know you're sitting there saying, "What's going on? Why are we sitting here?" And nobody is going back there to tell them what's going on. So you have to deal with that.

Then, just to answer your broader question, it was one thing after another. It was exhausting. The travel office thing was right after the haircut. It was like days after. Is this all in my briefing book? I do remember the timeline, which is taken a lot from the *Washington Post*, but my memory was that both of them were probably in May.

Riley: I think that's right. The World Trade Center thing occurs much earlier than that, as I recall.

Myers: April, maybe even March. It was early.

Nelson: So this was annoying and absurd. Was it—

Myers: It was damaging.

Riley: The World Trade Center was February.

Nelson: Was it hard for you?

Myers: Was it hard for me? Yes.

Nelson: What was the most difficult of these episodes for you to grapple with and negotiate?

Myers: They were all difficult for different reasons. The one after the other always reminded me of being a kid, body surfing. You'd dive under waves trying to swim back out and you keep getting hit. Every time you put your head up, you get hit by another wave. You were afraid to put your head up. There was no light at the end of the tunnel, and the worst thing that could ever happen was you could come in thinking it was going to be an uneventful day, because shit would invariably hit the fan.

The World Trade Center was weird. Al-Qaeda wasn't on anyone's radar screen at that point. It seemed like the three stooges of Arab terrorists by the end of it. At first it was scary because it was, "What is this?" It was a couple of guys in a minivan with a bomb. It just seemed like it was destined to fail. In hindsight, I think it's scarier than it was at the time. It was scary for the people who were in the building, obviously, but I don't think the sense in the White House was, "Oh, boy, this presages some really big problems coming down the pike in about a decade." Maybe the people who knew more about the stuff than I did felt that way. I certainly never got that signal. I think our response suggested that that wasn't the way the official White House felt.

I mentioned Deborah Sale earlier. When we turned on the TV and said, "What? There was a bombing at the World Trade Center? There doesn't seem to be a lot of damage." Then out of the building comes Deborah Sale, of all people, because I guess Stan Lundine's office was in there. She was covered with soot, and that personalized it for sure, this person who had been on the plane with us.

Riley: The grown-up.

Myers: The grown-up, exactly. Just happened to be that his office was in that building. It was weird and scary, but weird things kept happening to Clinton. That was a good example. The Waco thing. What month was that, June?

Riley: No, April. So you get the World Trade Center on February 26 and then six weeks later, April 19, the siege ends, so that means that this is going on—

Myers: But that's of course the day that Tim McVeigh chose for Oklahoma City.

Nelson: Right—in '95.

Myers: That was obviously really horrible, all those children inside the compound. You can't really make this stuff up. There was a debate about that: should the President go out and take responsibility? I did think, as did Bruce Lindsey, that the President should. Other people didn't agree with that and I was surprised. I was very surprised when Clinton mentioned it in his book and said that in hindsight Bruce Lindsey and I were right, that he should have gone out. I was surprised that he remembered that.

Nelson: Why did he decide not to at the time?

Myers: It was really something that was being handled by the Justice Department, whose argument was that it doesn't rise to a Presidential level of intervention. The President was obviously being kept informed, which was important, but it wasn't something he felt he had to take responsibility for. The President doesn't have to take responsibility for every act of every agency inside the government. It's not an unreasonable argument at a certain point. But to have Janet Reno go out there and say, "I accept responsibility," and not to hear from the President, who's her boss—Had it just been the head of the FBI out there, that would have been one thing, but to have Reno out there and the President nowhere to be found I think was a little bit strange.

Riley: Was that resented within the White House that she had taken this action?

Myers: Janet Reno wasn't the kind to clear it with everyone before she did it. It was a statement of her personality. I think some people thought it was stand-up and some people thought it was unnecessary. I thought it was stand-up of her, personally.

Riley: But her having done this preemptively then complicates the business of the White House coming out and essentially mimicking the same statement that she just made.

Myers: Yes, there is that, but once the President speaks, everything else becomes background noise. So there might have been a little bit of carping about that, but what people really would have seen was the President coming out. It gets pushed down. It would have been commented on, I don't think there's any doubt about it, but still.

Freedman: What if I were to flip my question to some extent on its head and ask you to contemplate not the most challenging or frustrating experience, but what stands out as a triumph?

Myers: There were a lot actually, but even the triumphs—There was the passage of the assault weapons ban. Sometimes in victory are the seeds of other defeats.

Freedman: Victory for you in the way that you were able to handle it. Not just the policy victories. I mean a Dee Dee Myers victory, or a press, per se, victory.

Myers: That's a good question. Every day when things didn't go bad. That's the nature of the news business. It doesn't work that way. It's not like you get patted on the back—We got a good story today about something. News is what's different, and what's different and unusual is often

what's going badly. That's just the bottom line. I think the relentless negativity that's built into that is one of the most wearying things of being in that job. It's relentless bad news, compounded by the fact that things were rough in the first couple of years.

But I don't care who you are—Ari Fleischer, Scott McClellan—look at what Scott's days are like. The guy is constantly getting beat on. That's what my life was like too, and Ari's was the same. He had the shield of war and there was that period where people were focused on things that were more important than the most recent setback. But given the lack of an extraordinary moment like 9/11, anytime you're moving forward—Now, were there times when we averted problems? Yes, but I don't remember them as well because problems didn't happen. It's the dog that didn't bark. So the policy victories were the things that I remember as the high points because usually there was a lot of effort that went into them, the assault weapons ban being one of them.

Clinton worked really hard and we worked really hard on that, and it felt like it meant something. Defeating the NRA [National Rifle Association] meant something, and having some kind of sane piece of gun policy. No one was under the illusion it was going to solve every problem, but it was a way of saying, "Yes, we can get the country to do these things." Even passing Clinton's first budget—That was also a collective effort. I almost got myself into trouble on that one.

The whole budget thing had been going on for a long time, negotiations had been. So the budget gets passed by the House. At one point—I don't know who did it—I remember Mark Gearan having it in his hands. Somebody had put it together, and we're always trading this for that. OK, what can we do to get you to vote? That's how these bills get loaded up with pork. Somebody comes in with a little booklet and it's got a picture of an aircraft carrier and a picture of a monument and a picture of a bridge. It's the catalog of "What would you like in exchange for a vote?"

Mark was so funny. I don't know if he showed you his incredible humor when he was here. So everyone is laughing. Anyway, the House passes it narrowly and poor Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky has to cast the tiebreaking vote, or however that played out. Then it comes to the Senate.

Then there's that one lone holdout, Bob Kerrey. And Bob Kerrey is still really bitter about the election. "He's an exceptionally good liar," or whatever he had said about the President. So he's still Hamleting about whether he's going to vote for this thing or not. So he agrees to come to the White House for a meeting. The morning of the vote he shows up. I had to go out afterward and brief. They were asking me, "We saw Bob Kerrey come, what happened?" I said, "They went to the Residence." "How long did they meet?" "They met for an hour." "What did they talk about?" I said, "I'm not going to tell you. They talked about the budget." "What room were they in?" And I said, "The Bob Kerrey Room, formerly the [Abraham] Lincoln Bedroom."

Riley: So there you are, cracking wise.

Myers: Exactly. I'll do anything to get a laugh in the briefing room. So later they played a joke on me, where the Vice President, I guess he called me, I can't exactly remember. Andrea

Mitchell played that clip on her piece. That was kind of funny in the briefing room—I didn't expect to see it on NBC [National Broadcasting Corporation] *Nightly News*.

So the Vice President called me and said something like, "You know, Bob Kerrey has decided not to vote for the bill." I said, "Oh." He said, "You'd better come down here so we can tell the press." I think I went down there and just burst into hysterics. Then I think we went and told the President the whole thing. By then they were jolly because Kerrey had called and said he was going to vote for it. He gave some tortured speech on the floor, but he voted in favor of it. So the thing passed. And the Republicans were all saying, "It's the budget-busting, job-destroying, economy-ruining measure of all time." Of course that turned out to be exactly not true. So after everything we'd been through and all the criticism that we'd heard and all the questions that I'd had to answer and all the hard, hard work that went into getting that budget passed, it was the first installment on Clinton's economic vision for the country. That was a big victory, even though you got a lot of criticism for the budget—$250 million in new taxes and $250 billion in spending cuts—so no one was happy. But Clinton thought it was the right thing to do.

Riley: There was a considerable internal debate within the White House about heading in the direction of deficit reductions as opposed to the investments—

Myers: Right.

Riley: This was a case, wasn't it, where the campaign people were staking out a position that tended to differ from some of the deficit hawks?

Myers: Even some people who weren't deficit hawks. I don't consider Rubin a deficit hawk, but he believed strongly that it would reassure the markets and give Clinton a lot more flexibility down the road. Bob's a very wise guy, and Clinton—but Paul Begala and I had a tease-each-other kind of relationship. I remember him being kind of upset about it because he's an economic populist and he represented that thread to me, that we promised the investments. Our folks have been waiting a long time for this, and the argument that they'll be better off if they can wait just a little bit longer—and Clinton ultimately went that way.

One of the things that you do as press secretary—In many ways you have to put aside your own views. I tend to be more of a moderate, but you can't get too invested in the fight, because whatever the outcome is, whatever the President decides, you have to defend. So I tended not to get deeply invested in those kinds of arguments on health care. You try to keep up with it. You try to understand people's motives so that you understand why people are telling you what they're telling you, because half of your job is sorting through information, understanding that none of it comes to you clean. Everybody is selling something. It's just human nature and the nature of the jobs. You have your own feelings about these things—at the same time I didn't get invested in the outcome.

Freedman: Are there any instances that stand out in which you felt that your own political or ideological underpinnings were being strained by what you needed to say?

Myers: No, not strained. I remember thinking I really disagreed with Clinton's Cuba policy. I think it's kind of ridiculous that we don't have more normalized relations with Cuba, but Clinton

said, "I want to win Florida in 1996," and he did. So that was a political decision more than a philosophically driven foreign policy, national security kind of decision.

Nelson: Did the Clintons at some point decide that the press was—if not an enemy—at best, not a friend?

Myers: Very early on.

Nelson: Very early in the Presidency or—

Myers: I think during the campaign. It ebbed and flowed a little bit in the campaign because it was very rough for most of '92. From the convention on there was a different tenor to the coverage. Then it got rougher again during the transition, and by the time we got to the inauguration, there was a lot of tension. So the President started his tenure in the White House with the door closing. All the symbolic stuff that was going on—gays in the military, the collapse of the Attorney General, the door closing, the general suspicion of the pledge to cut 25 percent of the President's staff. Then of course that just begat more bad stories, which begat more suspicion of the press.

Nelson: Why did they think that was the case? Why did they think the press was against them?

Myers: Because they were?

Nelson: If they were, what did they think the press's motivation was?

Freedman: So you shared it?

Nelson: Let me get an answer to this.

Myers: Yes, I did. Is it ever universal? No. Was there a certain rhythm to it and is there a collectiveness to coverage? There absolutely is. There were certain members of the press who set the tone. But I think it had to do with—There was a brief romance with Clinton in late '91. "Wow, this guy has new ideas. He's all about policy," blah, blah, blah.

It wasn't the Gennifer Flowers stuff; it was the draft that really began to redefine the press's view of him. It began with a lot of the men who were of similar age who had received draft notices. They couldn't believe that Clinton would say he didn't remember it. Then it became this question of can you believe what he says. I'm not saying there weren't reasons that the relationship had evolved in the way that it had, but there was so much disappointment and disbelief. The press doesn't want to be lied to. Nobody wants to be lied to, but the press doesn't want to be lied to for two reasons. One, because it makes them look bad. Reporters never want to be made to look bad. When they write something and it turns out that the guy's not telling the truth, they look like idiots.

So you get back to those personal motives. I think a lot of people felt—I know Jeff Birnbaum, in particular, of the *Wall Street Journal* had written a long piece about Clinton's draft, and then all this stuff came out. He was furious. He felt he had been lied to, as did a couple of other people who'd written. I think Dan Balsney had written about the draft at this point. I think that's the

right sequence. So there was this thing. Then there was Whitewater. There were a series of episodes where people came to believe, and not without some reason, that you had to be very careful about what Clinton said. That created an atmosphere where the press was particularly distrustful.

Nelson: But the Clintons are not thinking, *The press are against us because we lie to them*. Why do they think the press are against them?

Myers: Because they think that's the press's view of their role, that that's just the way it is.

Nelson: Against all Presidents? Against people from Arkansas?

Myers: I don't know. That was *definitely* part of it, a cultural bias thing about people from Arkansas. Sometimes Clinton would say things like, "They're against anybody who wants to do anything, anybody who wants to change anything, anybody who doesn't want to go to their little dinner parties in Washington." That was part of it too. The Clintons did not pay homage to Sally Quinn, a little bit with Mrs. [Katherine] Graham, because she was everything in Washington social life in some ways. But they didn't kiss the rings of the reigning social queens and kings. So that was part of it. In hindsight they would have been better off if they'd done it.

I understand why they didn't necessarily feel like they had to or should have to. But it would have made sense for them to have people like that to the White House right away. Keep your friends close and your potential enemies closer. Washington is the only city in the country where the press is on a par with the power brokers.

Nelson: Only city in the world.

Myers: Yes, maybe. I don't know.

Nelson: I think that's true.

Myers: Ben Bradlee is still a really important person, but you go places and it's Al Hunt and Andrea Mitchell and Alan Greenspan, and it's a mix of people who want to play Bob Schieffer, and these are people who are fixtures in Washington society. Kate and Jim Lehrer. The [Walter] Pincuses, Bill Plante and Robin Smith. They're all part of that Georgetown—John Sullivan, publisher of the *Atlantic*. It's just a whole establishment of people who are in the media.

Riley: Was there ever an effort made in the early stages when you were there to move into that community? Was it through somebody like a Lloyd Cutler, to make peace with the permanent Washington establishment, who felt like there was some utility in that in later years?

Myers: I think there was some. I think Vernon [Jordan] probably tried to do some of it. I think Hillary invited some of the women figures of Washington into the White House at one point. I think there was also a feeling—contempt is too strong a word—but you are NOCD: not our class, dear—from Arkansas. So the incentive to do it was minimized by that. From the beginning it was like, "Oh, do you think they require shoes inside the White House?" I think there was a feeling on the Clintons' part that that was the attitude with which they were being received. But of course, you're the President and people will come.

Things that you know after a couple of years that would have been so helpful to you—It's life, but I think everything in the White House is life writ large. Certainly that would have helped. We also only had so much time and energy. You can't serve all these masters. You have the Washington establishment, and particularly from their perspective, how important can that be in a country where you're pledging to—plus they would have been criticized for it if they'd done it too. We're for putting people first. I don't see how putting Sally Quinn in the empty seat next to you is quite putting people first.

Nelson: You're right.

Riley: Did Clinton personally feel comfortable with those folks?

Myers: Clinton is comfortable with everybody if you could get past some of that. I just think he's not a dinner party kind of guy. If you want to come over and talk policy—great. Bush isn't either. Reagan was. They came in and they killed Washington. They were *it*; they knew how to—The Clintons could have done a little bit more of that.

Nelson: Mark Waldman? I read his book, *Clinton and Me*. He said that when he was writing jokes for, I guess, Clinton's first appearance before the White House—

Myers: No, you're talking about Mark [Katz]. [Michael] Waldman was a speechwriter, but he didn't work at the White House.

Nelson: Wrote for them?

Myers: Yes. I can't believe I'm blanking out. You know my pattern. It will come to me in a minute. He was on the Dukakis campaign, also.

Nelson: For these ritual reporters' dinners that the President comes in to address, Clinton wanted jokes that made fun of the reporters and had a hard time getting the idea that no, you're supposed to make jokes that make fun of yourself.

Myers: Right.

Nelson: In those kinds of events, which are pretty important in the Washington ritual calendar, did you guide him in any way?

Myers: A little bit, certainly in those kinds of broad strokes. Mark started doing that early on and did it pretty much every year. I'd see drafts of it. Humor writing is certainly not my forte, but I certainly understood the culture of the press and the culture of that big room at the White House correspondents' dinner. Mark used to come see me and say, "Do you think this is funny? Does this work?" So I did weigh in on those. Clinton would say, "Let's make fun of Sam Donaldson." Let's *not.* [*laughter*] Mark Katz.

Nelson: That's right.

Myers: And Clinton got very good at it. He did crack the nut. He did figure it out. I'm sure that there were always a few things he wanted to do that Mark thought were—There were a lot of

other people besides Mark, but Mark ran the process, thought it was a good idea. Then there are ways in which I'm sure Clinton made a lot of the jokes better by becoming them. By the end he understood how to do that.

Riley: Does Clinton have a good sense of humor?

Myers: Yes, he does.

Riley: Is he a joke teller?

Myers: He's not a joke teller. He tells funny stories. He likes to make fun of other people, but in a gentle, teasing way, not a mean way. I think it's safe to say he's rarely the butt of his own jokes voluntarily.

Nelson: Did a lot of people tease him in the White House, around the campaign?

Myers: You could in certain ways. It could be a little tricky, though. I don't want to say he takes himself seriously, because that's not quite it, but he's not the butt of his own jokes. People who are the butt of their own jokes are people who are generally easy to tease, right? They don't mind. People for whom other people are the butt of their jokes may not be the people who are easiest to tease. I think Clinton is more in the latter—but there were certain things you could tease him about.

Nelson: Like what? Could you tease him about his weight?

Myers: No.

Nelson: What did you tease him about? Broad strokes, what kinds of things?

Myers: That's a good question.

Nelson: Did he have a sense of humor about himself?

Riley: Golf?

Myers: Yes, stuff like that. You had to be careful. You couldn't say, "Oh, you cheat at golf." "I do not." That was not a good idea. I'm trying to think of an instance, stuff I would have felt comfortable—

Riley: His clothing.

Myers: He was kind of not teasible. That's not entirely true. I never really would have teased him about—He had this one green shirt that he always used to wear when he was supposed to dress casually. You could mention to anybody who was there in the first couple of years about the green shirt and everyone knows what shirt it was. I wouldn't have teased him about that. You could make a joke about an event, like getting the haircut on Air Force One, for example. Some shared experience where he wasn't really the butt of the joke. There you are getting your hair cut—He could laugh about something like that, with some distance on it. But I wouldn't tease

him about how he looks. You wouldn't tease him about eating fries off somebody's plate or his weight, which he was kind of sensitive about. There's an earnestness about him.

Nelson: Would he tease you guys?

Myers: Not about stuff like that. He loved to make people blush about whatever it was. So he would try to find your blush button and then he loved to, gently—

Freedman: For example.

Nelson: Give us some good buttons.

Myers: This woman, Wendy Smith, who was the trip director. He would tease Wendy. "I saw that Secret Service agent looking at you." Stuff like that, which of course was always true. Wendy was doing everything in her power to get that agent to look at her, but the fact that he would catch her at it—She would blush. Then of course he would always watch, and she would always know that he was watching. Then as soon as he would even look at her she'd blush, because he would see her. He loved that kind of stuff.

Nelson: Did he flirt?

Myers: Yes, definitely.

Nelson: Say more, because that ended up being an important part of his Presidency, the flirtation—

Myers: He flirts with men and with women. I don't necessarily mean that as a sexual thing.

Nelson: That's what I meant.

Myers: He's good, flirting is really about establishing a little bit of intimacy, which he was good at doing.

Nelson: What about the hundred million people at the same time?

Myers: A rope line of a hundred people—He could do that with each person individually and every one of them thought that he or she was the one person the President was going to remember at the end of the day.

Riley: The men and the women?

Myers: The men and the women, yes. Joe Klein in *Primary Colors* called it aerobic handshaking, where he'd put one hand on your biceps and hold your handshake a second or two longer than he needed to and he'd look you right in the eye, oh yes. What made it successful and effective was that it came from a place of genuine enjoying connecting with people and enjoying being connected with. He liked when people felt that way. They connected with him, and he liked that. It was obvious and it was good. It was also part of his ability to disappoint, because he could establish the sense of intimacy with people and then people sometimes felt let down

because it was unsustainable. But it didn't mean, in my observation of him, that it wasn't genuine in the moment it was happening. It was just serial.

Riley: And at risk of misinterpretation.

Myers: And it was, in many ways. It could be that people think he's with you on a policy, and I think people could think it was more inviting than perhaps it was.

Riley: I've heard sometimes from people who worked with him on congressional affairs that there would be members who'd come over from the Hill and leave a room thinking they had heard something they hadn't heard?

Myers: Right.

Riley: This is something that you witnessed?

Myers: Yes, but not in the same way as that, because where my life intersected with him didn't have much to do with making deals. But it did happen in interviews, where he would say something where a reporter—Yes, I guess it did happen in my world.

Riley: But the reporter thinks he or she heard something that had actually a different spin or twist than they felt.

Myers: I guess my sense is that it didn't happen—I can't even think of a specific example of how it happened, but it did. There were times when people would walk away from it thinking that he was going to do something that he probably had no intention of doing, or that he believed something.

Riley: He didn't like to disappoint people.

Myers: Right, no question about it. He did not like to disappoint people. It's easier to say yes than it is to say no.

Nelson: When you first heard the reports about Monica Lewinsky, did you think, *Yes, I believe that. I saw him behave in ways*—?

Myers: I did not see him behave in that way. He was occasionally flirtatious. We had a warm relationship. I never felt it was inappropriate and I never saw him—He would look and he didn't mind getting caught looking. Sometimes you could see—As opposed to going, "I wasn't really looking at that woman," it was more like, "Did you see what I saw?" He did that, and he allowed women into that a little bit as well as men. He was always looking. But I honestly never saw him do anything that I thought was evidence that something was going on. I never saw a relationship between him and a woman that I thought was different.

First of all, when you're with him at the White House, where is he ever alone? Which is why this complicated geography of the Oval Office hallway becomes so strange and yet so inevitable, because there's no place that the President is alone—ever. There are peepholes and agents and people. So when I first heard it, I don't think I knew what to make of it. I certainly didn't say,

"Oh, that's impossible." But I didn't say, "Oh, boy, that's what I was worried about," because that wasn't true. Then in those early reports, which we talked a little bit about yesterday—there's no relationship in the language and there was no sexual, "I never had sexual relations," I thought, *Boy*. But what really convinced me—

Nelson: You thought, *Boy* what?

Myers: I thought, *This sounds "possibly parsable,"* to use a word [Mike] McCurry famously invoked. I just thought, *I don't know what that means.* I wished that I could be confident it meant, "I never had a sexual relationship with her of any kind," but I believed that Clinton wasn't going to say something that was completely not true.

Somebody of course looked up "sexual relations" in Webster's dictionary, which defined it as "sexual intercourse." So he's saying he didn't have sexual intercourse with her. With Clinton I don't know if he would really be that literal about it, but I wasn't sure that he wouldn't. I didn't think the "is" thing—but when I heard that she made 37 visits to the White House after she was no longer working there—and what really convinced me was the intensity of those tapes. There was some relationship there. That in 37 visits, there was some physical contact. I didn't know what it was, but I knew that it wasn't going to turn out good.

Nelson: So to you this behavior seemed out of character for Clinton, or is that too strong?

Myers: That's too strong. There were a lot of stories about him. I'm not saying anything that you all haven't read. I didn't hear any stories beyond Gennifer Flowers, the standard stuff. And there were always women who were making it clear that they were available for whatever he was available for. There were women around—He has that effect on people and women—

Freedman: Who are these women? Are they staff?

Myers: Less staff. It wasn't a big staff thing, I didn't think. Fundraisers, people in the second orbit; people he would meet on the campaign, supporters; people that he would come in contact with, movie stars, people who just liked the cut of his jib. It wasn't exactly out of character, but I also thought he'd worked really hard to be President, that he knew he had enemies and that they were lying in wait for him, and he knew that this was an area of vulnerability for him. I believe that he believed that sexual indiscretion would be a hard one for him to survive politically because he had basically told the American people, "Yes, once, but not now."

They forgive you for the sins of your past, but when you tell them you're not going to do it anymore and then you do, people feel betrayed. I believed that's what he believed. And I still believe that that's what he believed, and yet forces greater than that obviously took over at some level. So I can't say that I thought it was out of character, but I didn't think he was willing to risk it all for that. I didn't know where the story was going, but like I said, I didn't think it would end up good. So my posture publicly, because I was on television quite a bit during that time, was, "I don't think this looks good. I think the President ought to tell the public the truth. Let's let the story play out."

I guess they started talking impeachment immediately because George Stephanopoulos offered the "I" word in the first days or hours. I never thought that he should be impeached for it, and I

still wonder if he hadn't just come out when the story first broke and said, "I had an inappropriate relationship with her. I'm not going to share the details of that relationship with you. It's between me and my family. I never suborned perjury, and that's the end of it." It couldn't have ended up any worse, because I don't think that the Members would have come down to demand his resignation, because they know he never would have resigned. I don't think anybody who knew him had any illusions about that.

I think that Dick Morris was wrong. Taking some funky polling—What the hell was that? I think Clinton's instinct at first—It's not exactly "put it all on the table"—was, "Maybe I should just tell the truth about this and get it, not behind me exactly, but lance the boil a little bit." Now, because of the tapes and everything, I didn't know what would happen.

Riley: He's not a man for whom you usually hear the word "discipline" used as a descriptive term. Were there areas in which he did exercise a great deal of discipline?

Myers: I think he became more disciplined in all of the exercises of his Presidency as time went on. I think he was intellectually quite disciplined in that he really educated himself about issues. He was probably more voracious than disciplined. But for him, getting into the complexity of it was very important. He didn't phone stuff in. He was thorough in his thinking. He wasn't always right, but he was always willing to do the hard work of learning, integrating, thinking through the consequences. Like I said, he wasn't always right, but who is? I always respected him for being willing to do the hard work of policy. Sometimes he got too involved. But he didn't leave it to other people.

Nelson: I wonder how much he—Mrs. Clinton too, but in particular he—thought he knew about being President because he'd been Governor of Arkansas. *I know how to handle the legislature. I know how to handle the news media. I know how to get the job done in the amount of time.* How much he thought he knew about being President. It turned out that he underestimated that.

Myers: I think that's inevitable. People run for President because they think they can handle it. I think they all go into it thinking they know quite a bit about it.

Nelson: Maybe some of them go into it thinking, *It's a bigger job and I can handle it, but I know it's going to be a different kind of challenge than I've ever had before*. I wonder if Clinton thought about it that way.

Myers: Yes, because he's a student of history. I think Bush had the advantage of having spent so much time around it. So maybe he more than most Presidents had a better feel for what he was getting into. But Clinton, there aren't many books about the Presidency that he hasn't read. I think he had some sense of the range of issues he would face, the complexities. I also think that he thought he'd been a pretty successful Governor, he was good at being a chief executive, and he was good at managing his legislature, which of course is a one-party deal in Arkansas. I don't think he was prepared for the intensity of the Presidency on a lot of levels.

Some days he was more surprised by some things than others—the intensity of the media. I'm not sure anything really prepares you for that unless you've been through it. In many ways, Bush, at his father's side, had been through it. The pressure of the job. Everyone talks about how much Presidents age. That's a consistent hallmark of these guys. The relentless demands of the

job. So I'm not sure they can prepare you. I think Clinton thought he could probably solve more things just by willing them to be solved, applying his endless amounts of energy. He told me, not too long into his Presidency, that he used to sleep about four hours, but he had to sleep six hours now because the job was so much more stressful. That was interesting. So it increased his sleep by 50 percent.

Nelson: It's good that he could sleep more, given the stress.

Myers: Yes.

Riley: I want to ask a related question, and that is Clinton, a good politician who becomes President, and I guess that must define in some way every President, gets used to relying on his own conception of what political reality is because he's out among people all the time. Whether it's Reagan reading a crowd or Clinton working a room or whatever, they absorb political information based on being out.

You get into the White House—something Michael touched on a while ago—you're surrounded by this bubble. You've got the security bubble. You've got a very different kind of media filter than you've ever been used to. Beyond that, your sensors are all shut down, the ones that you've relied on throughout the entirety of your career. How big a problem was this for Clinton? Were there ways that he and his staff attempted to compensate for the loss of this political contact, this personal contact that he had relied on before he became President?

Myers: He definitely felt that way. He used to say the White House is the crown jewel of the national parks system or the state penitentiary. [*laughter*] He did feel cut off. In a small state like Arkansas, he was constantly traveling around, hearing from people directly. People were less unwilling to tell him things that he disagreed with when he was the Governor of Arkansas as opposed to President. People start all of a sudden agreeing with you all the time. So he definitely felt it.

I think that was one of the reasons, in the early years in particular, he was always up on the phone late at night calling people and trying to figure out ways to create his own feedback system. He likes to get out, to go on the road. He liked to go out and get among the peeps, but even then, you're behind a rope line all the time. Over time, I'm not sure. It's a good question of how that particular need for him evolved. I wasn't there, so I didn't observe it as carefully, because he seemed to me to maintain his barometer most of the time. He could still read the political tea leaves pretty well. If it hadn't been for the pardons at the end of his term, he would have left office a pretty popular President with a high job approval.

Nelson: Mid to high 60s, yes, even during the impeachment.

Myers: And the personal stuff was coming back up. Then the Marc Rich thing just killed it.

Riley: But that's a piece of evidence, right? Someway or other the political antenna, I presume, was malfunctioning.

Myers: He said, and I certainly observed this, that his political antenna malfunctioned when he was overly tired. In the last weeks of his Presidency, he was trying to do everything that he

wanted to do to close every loop and finish everything that he could. I'm sure it was a peripatetic run against the inevitable end of something he didn't want to end. I think he exhausted himself and he was trying to pay back people, trying to use the last vestiges of his huge power to help people who he thought had helped him.

It got all bollixed up. People who were his friends were pushing him to do things that they shouldn't have pushed him to do, and it failed him. There's no question about it. To me that was as frustrating as anything that happened in all the years I had known him.

The last few months were the retrospective: Let's look at what kind of a President he's been. People were coming back at the end of it all saying that in spite of the trauma that he put us through, in spite of the things that we didn't like, there's this, there's this, there's this; it's been a decent run for him. Then all of a sudden it was like all the things that were not so good about him came crashing back through the windshield. Now we've got to do this again.

Nelson: Back to the time when you were in the White House. You said he would late at night make lots of phone calls, which made me think of Dick Morris. Did Dick Morris become the recipient of a lot of those phone calls, and a lot of that advice, while you were still there?

Myers: I think he did at the end, around the time of the '94 midterm, but I didn't know it.

Nelson: You didn't know it at the time? Did you hear him saying things and wonder, *Where did he get that?*

Myers: No. I was surprised that he didn't resist the kind of strategic overview of the '94 midterm: Let's go attack Reaganomics but not Reagan. It was, *What?* I'm not kidding. I was surprised that Clinton didn't just say, "Are you nuts?" But I think the collapse of health care—That was another point where his political antenna—He was really tired—just kind of failed him. I remember sitting in some of these meetings and someone saying, "I am not a pollster, but I'd like to see the poll that produced this." [*laughter*]

Riley: Who said that?

Myers: Stan at one point. But there was this whole framework that they had put together. I remember thinking it was very strange. I was surprised that Clinton—I would have thought had Dick Morris—I don't know the stage. I have never in my life lined it up, what the status of their relationship was in the weeks before that. But I certainly didn't hear any triangulating going on. Maybe in ways I was unaware of it.

Freedman: You just mentioned Stan Greenberg. Did you have a relationship with him?

Myers: Yes.

Freedman: What was that like?

Myers: Very cordial, friendly. I certainly saw him more during the campaign. He was around more. I don't think I knew him before '92. I don't remember meeting him for the first time, actually. Anyway, Stan and Mandy and James and Paul were the strategic core. Stan came and

went during the campaign. I'd see him occasionally around Washington, not too often. He had done a good job, and I still think he's a good pollster, very reputable firm. I just think the framework for that particular chapter was—I don't know. It just struck me as—I was more surprised that Clinton didn't respond to it differently than anything else. Maybe he did. I don't remember if he went out—I don't remember ever hearing him say anything about Reaganomics, but it might just be that I'm not remembering.

Riley: We've touched several times on the health care piece, but we haven't dealt with it in any detail. Was that something that was hived off and set apart from your shop? Was it a separate press operation?

Myers: It was. It was obviously a big and complex project and they had a whole suite of offices in the OEOB. There was a woman, Laurie McHugh, who did a lot of the day-to-day explaining how it wasn't true that you couldn't pick your own physician. You had this whole thing that was 1,400 pages long, or 1,357 pages. For the most part I was happy to kick questions about that off. But there were times when it was front and center, and so we had long debates in the briefing room about what was universal health care, 100 percent? Would it only be successful if every single person was covered?

Dave Barry once came for one of these days when we did a hundred questions on what is universal, and he wrote a very funny piece about it. It was a visit to Washington, so the whole thing wasn't just about that, but there was a whole long thing. Finally he said, "I got the sense that Dee Dee Myers might be fun if you could take her out for a beer and get her to explain what universal health care is" or something. It was very funny.

Riley: I think we missed that in the briefing book .[1]

Myers: It was the absurdity. You're standing there. What, about 97.5 percent, would that be universal? Then at one point Clinton accepted 96 or 98 percent as universal. Well, "Last week you said universal is universal, we're not going to put a number on it, but now you're putting a number on it." We had a lot of that kind of absurdity to deal with.

A couple of things that I knew—Again, you're not in a position to affect the outcome—but I would have an extremely difficult time explaining this to people whose whole job in some respects was to cover it. There were certain aspects of it I had trouble understanding. I couldn't explain it to people who had a lot of context for understanding it. I couldn't explain it to my friends. That's a bad sign. This is not good politics. Seriously, it's not good politics. It was easy for the Republicans to pick aspects of it, like you're not going to be able to have your own doctor—and the length and the secrecy of it.

When we closed the door to the press operation and then reopened it, reporters used to come up to my office all the time. I realized very quickly that this was not only not a bad thing, it was a good thing. If it's two o'clock in the afternoon and Terry Hart from the AP would call my office and say, "I just got a beeper about blah, blah, blah," or "Congressman So-and-So just said this."

[1] Dave Barry, "This City Is Nothing Like the Planet Earth—an Outsider's Guide to Washington," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1994, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/1994/08/14/this-city-is-nothing-like-the-planet-earth/4f302a78-4ca7-44ff-8e35-9414bd663db4/.

Or "Senator So-and-So said they didn't like this part of your health care plan; have you heard that yet?" No. "Well, why don't you see what you can find out and get back to me?" It was an early warning system for me. I would protect Terry's propriety. He would always get the first callback, but I knew it gave me a huge advantage in terms of preparing, giving everyone in the White House a heads-up about something that's coming.

They would come up and drop little pieces of information on me all day long, and it was hugely helpful. I always thought that the health care plan was analogous, in that doing it in secret among only people who agree with your perspective robs you of the feedback that you might get. You've got this incredibly complex thing. Here are certain ideas that are going to work and certain ideas that aren't going to work. There needed to be more give-and-take. Just locking yourself in your room with a bunch of really smart people might be theoretically a really sound plan, but it's probably not politically viable. Without that, in a pluralistic democracy it doesn't make sense to do it. So that was a frustrating experience. There was no varying from the party line on it, either. That was a one-way ticket to a new job.

Riley: Was that characteristic, or was it because it was Mrs. Clinton's project and one didn't—

Myers: It was because it was Mrs. Clinton's project and one didn't go there. It was more than that; that's not quite fair. Clinton had chosen to make it the centerpiece of his domestic policy agenda. It was considered part of the economic plan. Once they had committed to go down that road, there was no turning back and no choice but victory, so you had to keep it to yourself.

We did talk about it among ourselves, and I would certainly raise my concerns to other people, but only in the sense of "I don't know where this is going." It wasn't like "We really need to rethink this." People weren't that interested in my opinion about the broader policy. I don't know *why,* given my extensive background in health policy.

Then of course there was always the question of Mrs. Clinton's role, which probably made it difficult. It made her a target, obviously. She was unelected. People felt she was unaccountable because the President—What was he going to do, fire his wife? I don't think so. So there was none of the so-called traditional accountability built into the relationship. It made the public nervous. People interpreted it as her being power-hungry too.

Riley: Did you have interactions with Ira Magaziner?

Myers: A little bit.

Riley: How did you find Ira to work with?

Myers: I didn't work with him. He'd occasionally come. We'd see him in meetings. He would explain things that he was working on. I didn't cross paths with him enough in a working relationship. Was he flexible? Was he open? I don't know. I read stuff about it, but I don't have any firsthand experience really with that.

Riley: The impression you get from the outside—Is he somebody who didn't have a great deal of media savvy?

Myers: He definitely didn't have media savvy or political skills. He was sort of an intellectual.

Nelson: Could you talk in whatever way you want about your relationship with Hillary Clinton? Over time, starting with that first interview for the job.

Myers: That's when I met her for the first time. I'd certainly read a lot about her by that point. I thought she was a tremendous asset for the campaign. It became a little more complicated, which surprised me—I wasn't expecting that. The tea-and-cookies comment on the sidewalk in Chicago was a classic. People still talk about it. Somebody said Bill Clinton could bake cookies. It's another one of those things that went right to something so profound in our culture, some ambivalence about women in power, really. I thought it was fascinating and it became clear to me that she was going to be a bit of a Rorschach test for how people felt about women in powerful or nontraditional roles.

My relationship with her was always pretty cordial. I worked for him and not for her, so I never felt like I knew her as well as I knew him. I just had a friendly relationship. But throughout the campaign, I don't know. Obviously I have my run-ins with Susan Thomases. I always assumed some of that got back to Hillary, although I always assumed they had a lot better things to talk about than me. But in terms of thinking through how the White House was going to be structured, it had to have come up. I don't know what Susan would have told her.

She was not a huge supporter of mine when I got to the White House. I never really felt that it was personal. She believed, and I don't think she was completely wrong, that all these young faces out there were not helping Clinton. He's got this kind of lurching first months of his Presidency, or first couple of years, and she didn't think that my position was working—being young, and I'm sure female, though she would never—It was just the way I thought it was playing. I don't know to what degree, because she always denied it. I actually confronted her about it once. I don't remember exactly what I said, but something like, "I understand that you think someone else should have my job," something like that. I can't believe I don't remember this more clearly. She said, "No, that's not true." This will probably all be put on hold until after the second term of the Hillary Clinton administration, but I was stunned by that. Because I knew that it was true.

Nelson: How did you know? Just from what you infer from what other people had said about her?

Myers: I didn't have to infer it. I asked direct questions of one person in particular who confirmed it.

Nelson: Who was that person, since you're embargoing—

Myers: It was Maggie Williams. She said, "Yes, I don't know quite what it is, Dee Dee, but it's totally true." I said, "I know it's true because I see it; I run into it all over the place." But at least I knew I wasn't crazy. Thank you, Maggie. Now that I know, just let me know what the playing field looks like and I can then figure out what my options are. But even all through that, I honestly never—maybe I was wrong—I never really felt it was personal. Obviously it had personal repercussions. I wasn't happy about it, but it wasn't that she just couldn't stand me. I can't say I didn't take it a little bit personally, of course, but you've got to back up a little bit.

Since then I see her occasionally and she's never anything but friendly to me. I wasn't sure—I did say some rather critical things of the President during the Monica Lewinsky trouble, particularly after the August 17 speech, where he basically said, "The Republicans made me do it." That was pretty upsetting to me. The President was angry at me for a while, but I never detected that from Mrs. Clinton, which was surprising to me. She was actually quite friendly to me. So I never quite knew what to make of that other than maybe she didn't see it, or maybe there were things I said that she thought were not out of bounds.

Anyway, when Leon Panetta became Chief of Staff, he was charged with making some staff changes and I knew that the press office was one of the places where people were looking to make changes. I didn't know what that meant for me.

Freedman: When was the confirmatory conversation with Maggie?

Myers: Later than this.

Freedman: So it wasn't early on?

Myers: I was picking up signals occasionally. A lot of things changed at this point because before that Mack had been Chief of Staff, and I found that—Again, I'll probably redact this until after my death, Mack's death—he was not very effective and you couldn't go to him. That was another part of the problem I didn't even touch on. At least when Leon was Chief of Staff, you could go someplace where somebody actually had answers and information and had an opinion about how things were going to unfold. I always felt like Mack was trying to avoid getting blamed.

So you'd go to see him about tough problems and he wasn't really very helpful; the buck didn't really stop anywhere. You couldn't go to Mack and say, "Why isn't there an institutional fix?" I could have tried to negotiate one individually with the people who had overlapping responsibilities with me, but there was no way to fix the structure, because one of the problems was at the top. There was not a lot of direction coming from the top. When you're operating in all these overlapping spheres—So when Leon came along, I thought that was a good move. I thought Mack would be more effective in his subsequent role as a counselor and looking at other more specific issues as opposed to dealing with the politics.

Riley: You'd gotten along OK with Leon and his people at OMB [Office of Management and Budget].

Myers: Yes, I had to take him to the woodshed once and he was pretty good about it.

Riley: You had to take him to the woodshed?

Myers: I did indeed. He said something in the *Washington Post* and I had to call him up and say, "Leon, for God's sake." He said, "I know, they're mad at me." I said, "Yes." I can't remember what he'd said, something about NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. My comment was basically, "Leon!"

I said, "taking him to the woodshed," but that's not exactly what it was. We went to the same college, both Californians. I always thought I had a friendly relationship with him. I remember he'd gone to Italy on a—I don't know if it was the G7 trip to Naples or if it was a different trip, but anyway, he'd introduced the President in Italian or something. He was there on the plane with Sylvia, his wife, practicing his Italian. We had some fun together. I was happy with it. I thought it would be a good change.

It quickly became problematic. He was charged with making some changes, and again I didn't know what to expect. The day after the announcement was made, maybe it was the night of, he did *Larry King* with Mack, and I thought he really pulled the rug out from under me. He didn't defend me.

The next couple of days he spent time bending over backward trying to reassure me that he didn't mean it to come out like it had, that they were going to make some changes, but that my job was safe, not to worry about it. He really was very kind about it and very sincere. I don't know to this day whether he was just pushing the ultimate confrontation down the road. I think probably no real decision was made, although I think there were going to be continued conversations about it. I wasn't completely reassured, but I was, somewhat. Nothing like that happens in a vacuum.

I'm trying to think what happened next. It was in September. I can't remember what the catalyst for it was, but Mike McCurry's name came up, and Mike had called me when it started around. He said, "Look, I'm not a candidate for your job." I took that with a grain of salt. The next day Dave Leavy—I wish Dave was here, because he'd remember certain parts of this. He comes in holding up a copy of Mike McCurry's résumé and he said, "This just got faxed by accident to our office." I said, "That's interesting." But I wasn't surprised. It said, "To Leon Panetta" on the fax cover sheet, but somebody sent it to the wrong phone number.

Riley: Were you tempted to take it to Leon?

Myers: Oh, we did, indeed we did, took it right down there and said, "This came for you."

Freedman: What did he say?

Nelson: Did he blush?

Myers: He didn't know what to do. I knew I wasn't going to get a straight answer. I knew that was the beginning of a process. Mike didn't owe me the phone call, but he shouldn't have called me and told me that he wasn't a candidate for my job when I knew that he was. I can't remember how the endgame of this started. Oh, Leon called me down to his office very shortly after, maybe the next day, maybe that day. "OK," he said. "I want to talk to you about how I plan to reorganize the press office." I knew he was reorganizing the whole West Wing staff, so this didn't come as a surprise.

He had a little flowchart; I can't remember what it was called. It wasn't like "*uber* press secretary," but it was something like that. He said, "I think this would be a job that would sit on top of all the press operations." Yes, it all kind of operated independently. There was me and then there was the intersection with communications. "This person will oversee all the various

press operations, but you will continue to be"—I don't remember what title, maybe it was traveling press secretary; it was some kooky thing—"And you'll continue to do the daily briefing." I said, "No Leon. I won't do that. This is a continuation of the same screwed-up structure that's gotten us to this point. You need to do one thing. You need to reestablish the press secretary in its traditional role. That person needs to be an assistant to the President. That person needs to be in the big office. That person needs to be in all the meetings. That person may or may not be me, but *this* person is never going to be me. This is already me and it doesn't work. He said, "I disagree with you." I said, "Fine. I'm not doing that job."

I said, "I think that what you should do is—maybe it's going to be me, maybe it's not me—I think you should give me a chance to do it. I've never had a chance to do this job." This all happened really fast. Basically, I think he said, "You need to go talk to the President."

Freedman: He said that to you.

Myers: I said, "OK." So I marched over to Nancy [Hernreich] and said, "I need some time to see the President. I just talked to Leon about the structure of the press office." She said, "OK." She called me back and said, "Come in and see him at six o'clock tonight," or whatever it was. So I came in and I told him. "Look. Leon had this idea and I don't think it works. This doesn't work for you. You need a press secretary who is strong, empowered, informed, and who everybody knows is the person. I think I should get a shot at that job. But what I'm not going to do is resign and walk out of here under these circumstances. If you want me to leave, I'm not going to be public about it. All you need to do is say thanks, and I'll walk out the door. But I'm not walking out of here in some ambiguous cloud. Fix it for me, or fix it for somebody else, but fix it. I think I deserve a shot. If you want me to, I'll leave at the end of the year."

He said, "Let me think about it." He called me the next morning and said, "OK, you can have a shot." He didn't say anything about the end of the year. But I told Leon, "He said, OK, but I'll leave at the end of the year." Which I shouldn't have done, but that was the deal, even though the President—I could have rolled him. "Rolled him" is the wrong word. If I had just not put that clock ticking, I could have freed myself from that.

But then, of course, the story leaked—and it wasn't me. I don't know if it was Leavy, and I've never really asked him. I should, because Leon got really mad. The President called me at 7:30 that morning. I don't remember when the story leaked, maybe even the night before. It's all kind of a jumble. Anyway, my sister had had surgery that day. I guess she had some ovarian cysts and she'd had a very bad reaction to the anesthesia, so she was really sick. Her husband called and said, "Can you come over here?" I said, "Of course." This is kind of weird timing, but I said, "Yes, fine." Plus I was kind of happy to get out of there.

The story by now is breaking. It unfortunately gets played as Leon Panetta, charged with revamping the White House, got rolled, which wasn't really the story. I wasn't trying to roll anyone. I didn't view it as a confrontation between me and Leon, because Leon had asked me to go to the President and let the President resolve it. I don't know if it was weird or gracious. I always thought it was to let me have my chance to make my case.

Anyway, I went to the hospital and my phone rings and it's Leon, yelling at me. I said, "Excuse me. You called me at the hospital. You know where I am, right? My sister's here and she's really sick. Do you think this is really the right time to be yelling at me?" He said, "You've made my—" I said, "I didn't do anything, Leon. I didn't do it, didn't leak it. It's not what I want to do. What have I leaked in all the years I've been with Clinton? That would suggest that's not how I operate. I'm a team player." That was what really poisoned the well for me with Leon. He was mad because he was embarrassed and felt it weakened his position. It certainly wasn't my strategy to try to do that. But he grudgingly then let me—I came back to my office that day and I'm not kidding, I had 20 things of flowers. I thought, *This is great for me, but just don't let Leon near this place.*

It was a Pyrrhic victory because I had made a strategic error on my own part in agreeing to leave. I don't know if it would have worked if I hadn't, but I don't regret doing it, because I believe to this day that I was right. The structure that Leon had proposed was just delaying the inevitable, which was that this was dysfunctional. You needed to have it as it was briefly for me, and then was reestablished for Mike and for Joe [Lockhart] and should have been from the beginning. In hindsight, I was always surprised. It was a misunderstanding of how important that job is from the beginning.

So the next three months were tense. I had to go to Leon. He had this 7:00, 7:30 meeting that was really the core. I talked about how much easier it got. Gergen was in there, so I went to him and I said, "Leon, I need to be in that meeting." He said, "Gergen's in there." "That's not enough." It wasn't too much longer that Gergen went to the State Department. "That's the whole point of this," I said. "You've got to have the press secretary. This isn't about me; it's about you've got to have the press secretary in this meeting." So he said, "OK," to his credit. It was tense. It was never friendly again, but he was pretty grown-up about it. He just went along and treated me respectfully in the meetings and he would talk to me. It wasn't as if he ignored me or anything.

The last day I was there, it was like sitting shiva or something. I don't know how the whole thing got started, but I'm not kidding, the President, Mrs. Clinton, everyone came by my office for a couple of hours. I just finally gave up and sat there and received visitors. The only assistant to the President in the whole building, the only senior person who didn't come by, was Leon. I didn't talk to him for years.

One time Todd and I were in a restaurant and he was there with his wife and they come walking by. He sees Todd and who else would Todd be having dinner with, right? It's not like he doesn't know that I'm going to marry this guy. So he goes, "Oh, Todd, how are you?" Todd says something like, "You remember Dee Dee?" It was so awkward. He goes, "Oh, hi." So that was kind of funny.

Nelson: What was that?

Myers: Of course he'd seen me. He didn't know what to do. I saw him at the library opening and I just went up to him and said, "Hi, Leon," and gave him a hug. He was so surprised and so relieved. Then he says, "Hey, we're going to this party, you want to come?" I said, "Sure." So my sister and I went off to some party with him. It's like—

Riley: Was that the sister who was getting surgery?

Myers: Yes, and not only that, he told my sister—This is very funny. She was a deputy assistant to the President and ran the women's office. She had a friendly relationship with him. She was in a meeting one day and I think he just raised it out of the blue. She might have said something to him; she's the type who would. "I didn't like the way you treated my sister." But he said, "It's one of my biggest regrets of my time there, the way things worked out with Dee Dee," which made me feel better to know that he at least felt bad about it.

I would have made up with him years ago. I just went a long period where I didn't see him. But I thought it was kind of funny that he was more awkward about it than I was.

Nelson: When you talked to Clinton and said, "This structure just doesn't work," it wasn't just Leon's structure, right? You'd been unhappy with—

Myers: Oh, totally.

Nelson: Had you ever talked with him about that before?

Myers: No. I don't think so, because it's not the kind of problem I would have taken to him. The President doesn't need to deal with that. I probably had a conversation with Leon. He probably called, or one of his deputies or something. There was a series of conversations going on about what was working, what wasn't working, and what people's views were.

I don't think it ever occurred to me that they would try to layer it, just because it made so little sense. If you looked at what the problem was, it wasn't that there weren't enough chiefs in the press department; it was the fact that there were too many chiefs. It's not something I wanted to take to the President, except Leon said, "Go sell it to the boss." So I said, "OK." Maybe it was later, because I guess I came back, maybe from my meeting with Clinton, and Dave said, "This is out." So I know it was one of my staff who leaked it, trying to protect me.

I think Clinton said he'd call me back, and he didn't say when. So I went to bed thinking he might call me at midnight. That was a little nerve-racking, not knowing what he would say.

Nelson: Had you had problems with your staff leaking information like that before?

Myers: No. I'm sure there were people who said things they shouldn't have said, but they didn't really leak on that kind of internal dynamic. I do believe that whoever did it was trying to protect me. The people who worked for me were mostly younger, very loyal to Clinton, very loyal to me. I think more than leaking, they sometimes inadvertently said things that they shouldn't, which happens. You have information; you're talking to reporters all the time. The relationships become familiar. Sometimes you're trying to show that you know something. You're trying to be helpful, trying to curry favor. So yes, that happens. When it did, if it happened repeatedly, I had more. I had to fire a guy named Steve Rabinowitz.

You guys know this story? He was the person who was in charge of the "shot," as it were, the guy who'd make sure at all these events that the picture was set up. He was very creative. He was pretty good at it, but he was brusque. "Brusque" is an understatement. He could break some

china. We were in Denver and he got mad at the Pope's advance man, who's like a cardinal, and told him to f— off.

Nelson: I think I know who that cardinal was.

Myers: Do you really?

Nelson: Frank Stafford.

Myers: Yes, it might have been. So this comes back to me. I had to fire him. I called him in. It wasn't the first time I'd had a conversation with him about this kind of stuff. I said, "You think you left me a lot of room here to maneuver? The guys with the red beanies, leave them alone." [*laughter*]

Nelson: Wasn't it within earshot of some key players?

Myers: Yes. And the guy was probably wearing this black smock, the whole thing, the beanie.

Nelson: He was getting in front of the shot, right?

Myers: He was getting in the shot.

Riley: I would guess that Rabinowitz is not a Catholic?

Myers: He is not a Catholic. That was another thing. It was like, let's not refight the Inquisition here or something. [*laughter*] So I had to fire him. That was an example, though. You asked if they leak. No, but they did stuff that got me in trouble.

Riley: What about leaking more generally?

Myers: My junior people didn't leak; it was the senior people who leaked. And there was a tremendous amount of it. There are a lot of reasons for leaking. Sometimes it's self-serving. People want to show that they're in the loop. Often they were trying to push the President in a particular decision-making direction. Not that Paul did, but an example of a time when people would be leaking like crazy was, are we going to spend money on investments, or are we going to spend it on deficit reduction?

People would start saying, "I was in a meeting with the President today and he said, 'We can't back off our pledge to the people. We promised investments we must make.'" So people would do that kind of stuff all the time. It was a relatively undisciplined atmosphere. Gergen talked to the press. There were a lot of people who were tasked with talking to the press. Too many. George and Mark and me, and then there were other people, a lot of people. It was not beyond their purview, the policy people, who also talked to reporters. It was certainly the way that people covered the Clinton White House. They do not cover the Bush White House that way, because people who aren't authorized don't talk. It's a totally different culture.

Riley: Was there an effort to police the leaks within the administration?

Myers: There was one time in particular when Clinton wanted to find out who leaked something. I don't think it was ever found out, but there were times, yes, when there would be an effort to crack down on leaks and there would be some new policy thing sent around, and within an hour it would have been leaked. Somebody like John King would call me, "I just got this memo that says there's a new policy about leaks." OK.

Nelson: When Bob Woodward is writing a book, is that an entirely separate category of willingness to leak? Because it seems like people know that it's going to be a best seller and they know if they don't talk to him they're going to be in the book anyway, but not in the way they want to be. Is that—?

Myers: Absolutely. Woodward makes that case, too. That's one of his tactics.

Nelson: He tells you—

Riley: Did he approach you when he was working?

Myers: He didn't. I didn't really talk to him about that book. But that is not really a case of leaks, because that was George's portfolio, and a decision was made to cooperate. Woodward came and said. "I want to write this book about the first year." He's quite good at convincing people. He did it with the Bush Presidency. It worked out better for them than for us. The commitment was that you don't publish anything—nothing will be in the newspaper; nothing will be in the book—until after this has been resolved, so people felt pretty free to talk to him.

He had broad access, and when the book came out and it was not so flattering, George had a little bit of hell to pay, even though a lot of people had agreed on the original decision. George became the guy who was shepherding the process and knew who Woodward was talking to and organized for Clinton to talk to him a couple of times. Then there was much hand-wringing about why the hell did we cooperate. But Woodward is famous for getting people to talk.

Freedman: Another thing that's going on during the summer of '94 is a series of these kind of off-the-record sit-downs with reporters. What was the thinking there, and who made the decision? How did you make the decision to invite particular people? Did it create discord among other members of the press?

Myers: It was something that I believed all along and reporters had a long ongoing discussion about. It came out of the sense that people had lost access to Clinton and had forgotten what a big thinker he is. It had all become these little caricatures of chaos and crisis and snippiness. So the thinking was, if people could sit down with him and talk to him more broadly about his thinking about some of these issues, they would have a better perspective on him, who he is, how this experience has been so far for him, et cetera.

So the decision was made to go ahead and try it. We put together the first group. I want to say it was Johnny Apple, maybe Ann Devroy. I think Ann was in the first or second group. We didn't do that many conversations, maybe three, maybe more than that. Maybe they continued them after I left, but my memory was there weren't that many. Clinton wasn't that relaxed. I was a little disappointed. One of them went better than one other one.

Freedman: What was the format? Just like a conversation?

Myers: Yes. It was just open, off the record. One of them might have been in his dining room; one of them was on a little patio outside his personal office behind the Oval Office. It was a nice day and we sat outside. It went about an hour. There was one in particular I think was pretty good. I remember Ann Devroy being there. It was either the first or second one. It quickly broke down into, "He said something interesting. Let's renegotiate the ground rules." I remember having this conversation with Ann Devroy, "Can I say that someone familiar with Clinton's thinking on this? Can I characterize it this way?"

People who know what the President's thinking, which would of course be the President who knows what he's thinking, said this? How can I characterize this? All of a sudden I saw it spinning out of control. Can you really have, in this environment, an off-the-record conversation with the President of the United States? It turned out that the answer was no, because we were past the time when that was possible, when everyone can put their feet up and have a drink or whatever—I know Bush One [George H. W. Bush] used to have certain reporters to the Residence for a martini or something. I think the world was better for there being a human relationship there instead of one that's always across the barricade. It collapsed after that.

Once we started trying to negotiate—*Well, this is on, now if I've given that to Ann, do I have to also call whoever else was in that one and tell them the same ground rules apply?*—it became not worth it. And then it would make Clinton more guarded to know that there was going to be some post facto negotiation about what did he say and what did he mean, and how can we characterize this. I don't remember how many more we had after that, but that to me was the point where it collapsed. It was a noble effort, but undermined by the culture.

Nelson: You said yesterday he could bring in whatever all-star team of historians he was interested in talking with. In that kind of setting he didn't worry about these folks going out—

Myers: He brought them in to pick their brains. He wouldn't worry that they might report on his encyclopedic knowledge of history. "The President, in a disturbing development, displayed actual knowledge of American history today." [*laughter*]

Riley: That's not a report you'll hear—

Myers: Not anytime soon. Clinton was totally engaged in those kinds of meetings and it was fun for him. I think we'd all sit back and say, "Go tell it from the mountain, what you just saw here."

Nelson: And did they?

Myers: Yes. [Steven] Ambrose was no liberal. He was a pretty conservative guy, but he came away from those things—You'd see him on television, "I was in the White House recently, telling President Clinton how smart I am, and I actually find that he's kind of smart too."

Nelson: Not as smart.

Myers: Exactly. So that was something that was fun. But he was able to do that. Clinton took great advantage of it, because he has such broad interests and so much energy for life.

Riley: We talked over dinner last night, and you might elaborate just a little on the record about some of these people that he did bring in.

Myers: He brought in many, many people. Yo-Yo Ma I mentioned, and Aretha Franklin, people like that. Aretha has done other things for him too, because she's a supporter. He would get to be friendly. We were in Prague and he and Václav Havel went to the club—That was a great night—where Václav plays a lot. Then Clinton played the sax and I guess Havel plays the clarinet. I think he does. He had this appetite for all of it, inviting cultural figures to the White House all the time. They didn't have a lot of dinners, but he was always in contact with people like that. He got a kick out of it. It was fun. Ride along with him and you'll never know what's coming down the pike.

Freedman: What's your relationship with him like? We talked a little bit about that yesterday, but after you left and during the Lewinsky saga, you suggested there was a lull—

Myers: I'd see him periodically after I left, but before the Lewinsky thing. I played golf with him; I'd occasionally go running with him. I'd call up Nancy and say, "Please put me on the list for the next time the President's—" Eventually you'd get a call, "Do you want to go running with him tomorrow at eight o'clock?" It was fun. Then we moved to LA. I think I was living in LA when I came back and played golf. I was in town and said, "I want to play golf with the President." He just said, "Erskine and I are going to go play golf." Anyway, then Lewinsky happened.

I didn't really see him much, but I'd keep in touch. I'd occasionally call John Podesta or other people and check in. I tried very hard to be what I thought was fair—*Is this in conflict with something that I said when I was there?* You always had the freedom to be out, to say things you couldn't have said then, but keeping in mind I had worked for him and was part of that. I also just tried to be fair to him, given what I felt I owed him. Podesta would always say, "I don't always like it, but I have to say that I don't think you've crossed the line." That meant a lot to me, because he's somebody whose judgment I trusted and I knew he was very close to the President.

I would talk to Rahm, or [Doug] Sosnik or whoever periodically. But I also knew that the President—John once said to me, "I don't always like it, and there's someone down the hall who doesn't particularly like it." But I also didn't think I was, in the grand scheme of things—When you're getting impeached, you're not really worried about what your former press secretary might say about you on CNN. It's just not the first thing that concerns you, to put it in perspective. But he was cool to me a couple of times when I saw him.

Nelson: Cool meaning distant, or cool meaning groovy.

Myers: No, not groovy, distant. It took a while for him to not be cool. I don't know if he got over it. I saw him at a wedding and it seemed like things had mended themselves a couple of years ago. I've seen him a couple of times a year now.

Riley: We're getting close to the end here. Vernon Jordan was another person from the outside, opaque in terms of what the relationship was with the President. Can you shed any light on that?

Myers: Vernon was something that Presidents need but don't often have, which is a friend. He gave him advice about certain things, but I think Vernon understands a lot about power. Vernon understands the raw exercise of power and how that game is played in Washington. I'm sure there are all kinds of ways in which the President confided in him and that he counseled the President. The fact that I don't know is a sign of why that relationship is successful.

I didn't mention that when this whole thing was unfolding with my situation—I'm sure I've gotten the timeline a little bit wrong, because I called Vernon before Leon showed me the flowchart. After Leon had come, I called Vernon. It all gets mixed up in my mind a little bit. I said to him what I later said to Leon, "I'll do whatever the President wants, but I'm not going to walk out of here right now. He or somebody has to let me know, so will you tell him that for me?" And Vernon said, "Yes, I will." A little while later he said, "I told him." "What did he say?" "He didn't say anything. He just nodded." I was grateful to Vernon. He was willing to do stuff like that. He didn't have to do it.

My message to the President was it doesn't have to be public. This was before I had a chance to see him about it. It's not in my interest for it to be public. But I feel obligated to try to resolve this in a way that works for the President. There must have been more time between. I think Leon was to show me the flowchart and then came back to me afterward. Because after that idea was out there, there must have been more time between. Then there was a meeting when I said, "I'm not going to do this." And he said, "You've got to go talk to the President again."

Riley: There was or is an extended version of your story in Jeff Birnbaum's book, and I guess my question for historical purposes is: Is it your sense that that account is a pretty accurate representation of what happened?

Myers: I'd have to go back and read it. I thought the book—

Riley: He must have interviewed you.

Myers: He did. The book was not successful. It didn't capture what I thought he wanted to capture.

Riley: In what sense, if you remember? It's unfair for me to raise it, but since you had been interviewed for it, that could help somebody who wants to know more about this.

Myers: He was trying to capture—I haven't read his account in quite a long time. I should go back and read it. The book was initially pitched to Begala, Eller, and me—whoever the fourth person was—

Nelson: Bernie Nussbaum.

Myers: I just think he was unable to separate our stories—I think Paul and Jeff and I probably never talked to Bernie about it, but he felt the same way. It was flat in interpretation. The book didn't do very well.

Riley: Too many chimneys, so to speak?

Myers: Maybe, yes.

Riley: Not enough of the chaotic interrelationships between each of your roles?

Myers: Maybe. It's been a long time since that book came out, seven years, eight years.

Riley: This is something that I usually go very much against and I hate to ask others to do it. I'm being guilty of it now. We scholars are always asking people, "Are you familiar with X's account or Y's account?" Again, the only reason I raise it in this instance is because there's a fairly elaborate discussion of the particulars of what you just talked about and I thought it might help us in shorthand.

Myers: It certainly would, I'm sure, help with the timeline.

Riley: That's fine. You're looking back on your years there. What is it that you feel the greatest sense of pride in having accomplished? And more generally, for those of us on the outside, what is it that you consider to be the singular accomplishments of the administration that you're proud to flag for us?

Myers: Clinton had many accomplishments. He was elected promising to focus like a laser beam on the economy, and I think he did that. I think that he did it by trying, on that particular basket of issues, to be broad and forward looking. He's optimistic by nature and he believes, as he always says, "Tomorrow will be better than today," but without sugarcoating it, helping people face the hard choices. Globalization, for example. He always said the Democratic tradition was antitrade. Even so, he pushed NAFTA. He believed it was in the best interests of the country.

He believed that, rather than telling people we can walk down the borders and keep manufacturing jobs at home, we've got to train people for a whole new world, and we can do it. I think he did what he could, because obviously in a free market there's a lot that's beyond the President's control. But I think his attitude and his leadership were great, and I think he also decided he was going to take on deficit reduction and things like that. Partly it was political pressure from Ross Perot and the Newt [Newton] Gingrich revolution, but partly he decided to do it, and damn it, he did it.

I think he left the country fiscally much better than he found it, and not just in the numbers and bottom line in dollars and cents but in terms of the country's attitudes about what was required. I think we've slipped back from that, from saying there are tough choices to be faced and we can't move ahead by looking back. Clinton isn't exactly known for tough choices, but he told it like it was. Obviously his Presidency was very divisive in ways, but I don't think he was a divider. I think his personality was different from that, and I think it was better for the country. What was the first part of the question?

Riley: What you're proudest of, your own sense of what you did best.

Myers: It's a good question. I'm really proud to have had the chance to serve and to help elect a President and to have had the opportunity to go through all of that, from the campaign to the inauguration. The transition was hideous, but the inauguration, trying to figure out how to make it work, I certainly learned a lot. For me it was a life-altering experience. Not everything turned

out the way I want, but I like to think that I made mistakes but I never lied. I think I left there without getting cynical, though there are some moments when you feel pretty cynical. I still believe in the process, which I think is important. It doesn't always work the way it should, but democracy is the worst form of government but for all the others.

I don't regret a day or a minute of it. It was an honor. We didn't talk at all about what it was like to travel around the world with the President, but that was an awesome experience. It certainly made me even more committed to the idea of the American experiment in democracy, because you see how many people around the world are yearning to have what we have in spite of all its flaws and frustrations. That was a pretty remarkable part of it as well, to see from that perspective, looking back. The world doesn't love us so much right now, but they still want us, at the end of the day, in spite of everything, to succeed. We owe it to the world to try to make sure that that happens.

I was very proud of what Clinton represented in the world, because it was an America that was open, that saw itself as part of the world. We're all going up or down together, as Clinton would say. Still, the way we were talking earlier about how the world responds to him as he goes around, those are important ideas that he has come to embody, and continues to in his post-Presidency. He continues to show the core of what I believed when I hooked up with him, who he is for. So in spite of all the frustrations that sometimes attend being around Bill Clinton, at the end of the day he's still out there fighting the fight, and I'm proud of him for that.

He has a lot to contribute. He certainly has made plenty of money, but that's not what he set out to do; it just befell him. He wants a little so he can take care of himself and his family, but that's not what gets him out of bed in the morning, and I admire him for that. He wants to continue to change the world.

Riley: Would you ever go back in?

Myers: Not now. As you know, I have two young kids. That's a lifestyle that's not compatible with young kids for me. Some people do it, God bless them, but that's not for me. I would never say never. Under the right circumstances? Sure. For a particular President at a time when I thought the job was compatible with the needs of the rest—I'm less willing now to give up my whole life for it. It seems to me that not every President's schedule requires that one gives up their whole life, although they're demanding jobs under any circumstances. I missed my best friend's wedding because of Harry Thomason and—what was the other guy's name—when they were going to take over the White House—

Riley: Watkins?

Myers: No, it wasn't Watkins. [Darnell Martens.] It's not important. In the aftermath of the White House travel office firings, a memo surfaced where Harry and this guy who owned a charter business—Harry was a small partner of this guy—a funder or something—and they had pitched taking over the charter business. Not so much taking it over, but anyway, it was interpreted by the press as Clinton fired the travel office so he could give the business to his friend Harry Thomason, which was pretty far-fetched. Harry had already two shows in

syndication. He didn't need the profits from the press charter. I don't miss that part of being tethered to events beyond your control and yanked around like a little rag doll on the ocean.

It's an honor and I wouldn't trade it for anything, even with all its attending difficulties.

Riley: We're very pleased that you agreed to do this.

Myers: I'm glad I could come.

Riley: We all very much feel enriched from the experience.

Myers: At least exhausted. I've worn you all down.

Riley: My standard line at the end of these things is we never exhaust all the possible topics, but we do exhaust the people.

Myers: I'd say that that is absolutely my experience. I concur.

Riley: It was kind of you to come. It provides a very important supplement to the archives we are collecting. On behalf of those students and scholars 20 or 30 years down the road who will crack this open and find something useful to know about our time, let me say thanks.