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RONALD REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH FREDERICK J. RYAN, JR.

May 25, 2004
Washington, D.C.

Interviewers

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UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

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Knott: Could you tell us how you first came to join the Reagan administration?

Ryan: Well, growing up in California, I'd seen him while he was Governor and of course, in the movie star years, but I was a student at the time and had never met him. I first met him in 1978 at a political fundraiser he was doing for a Congressional candidate. This was of course before his run for the Presidency. He was very accessible and open and friendly to talk to, and I had a terrific conversation with him.

When he decided to run for President in 1980, I had finished law school and had just begun with a law firm. I decided that I wanted to take some time off to volunteer on his campaign with the intention of going back and practicing law afterwards. I'd been to a few of his events earlier in the year in 1980 when he was in the primaries and was beginning his campaign. When he had the nomination, I finished law school and became a volunteer advance man on his campaign. That's how I really got to know him. I traveled around the country in 1980 doing advance work on his events and got to spend time with him and with other people on his campaign through the election.

In a Presidential campaign you have a lot of people who are on that campaign hoping that if things work out well, they'll end up in the administration and they'll have Washington jobs. I had taken a different track. Everybody knew I had just gotten out of law school and I was going to practice law with a California firm. So I didn't have any intention of coming back to Washington. In an odd way, that probably increased the opportunities available to me because people didn't view me as somebody who was a competitor for the jobs that might be open in the White House or elsewhere in the administration.

When the election was over I went back into my office and was a lawyer. When President Reagan would come to Los Angeles, I would help make arrangements for his events during the first few months of his Presidency. I'd also done advance work with Vice President [George H.W.] Bush on the campaign. When he was coming west or taking other trips, I would volunteer to help on those. I guess about midway through the first year—1981, his first year in office—I was approached about a couple of positions back in Washington. Finally, at the end of the year, I accepted one.

What was interesting—I don't know if this has come up with any of your other interviews—is that President Reagan wanted people from outside government. He didn't want bureaucrats, and he certainly didn't want people who had spent multiple terms in Washington. He wanted to have his own team. His general feeling about government was if you've been there long enough, you become part of it. So he, or people on his behalf, would approach potential appointees to the administration and say, "We're not asking you to commit to four years or two terms, but rather that you commit for one year." And I think he felt that he would get people from business, or in my case, a lawyer who came with a fresh outside perspective.

My law firm—and I know a lot of other people who came back under those circumstances—would say, "Fine, take a year. It's great for us, and a great experience for you." President Reagan knew that at the end of the year either people would like the job and they would stay, or he'd offer something else to do for a year. That's what led to me coming back at the beginning of the second year of the administration for a one-year job and staying both terms.

Knott: I see. And you came in handling appointments and scheduling. Could you give us some sense of what that entailed?

Ryan: Yes. It was really several things. One was handling the normal requests that come in, the public writing to invite him as President to come to their events. Thousands of those come in every week. We had a staff that would look at those. The staff consisted of both political appointees and some career people who had been there. There were people who had been there since the [Harry] Truman administration. These people were extremely helpful because they had the institutional knowledge. They knew some of the players who would write to every President and say, "You're my favorite President. Would you come to my event?" They were very helpful in processing all of those letters. So a part of the job was dealing with the thousands of invitations the President received.

I think we made a little bit of a mark on the way things were done in the White House. We realized that the President only had a limited amount of time. His time is the most precious commodity of the administration. If you consider all the duties he has as Commander in Chief, as head of state, as head of his political party, and as our national leader, you quickly realize there is very little time left for him to pursue his special initiatives.

There are certain fixed things that take up a certain amount of his daily calendar. If you are President you have so many times you have meetings with the Cabinet, you have so many times you have to meet with the Congressional leadership, so many hours a day of briefings from your National Security Advisor or domestic advisors, a certain number of events you have to do for your party, whether it's Democrat or Republican. And by the time we put all those things on a schedule, we realized that more than half of his time was already committed. There were things he wanted to do, like all Presidents, that were unique to his platform or his principles, and half of his time or more was already gone.

So we took this approach that we had to maximize the use of the remaining part of the time and found that there needed to be—and I don't think this had happened too much until that time—a synchronization between his message and his schedule. So we started looking very far out—six

months to a year in advance—and thinking, *What are the initiatives that he is interested in pursuing?* And then we would try to tie that to the schedule. Are there invitations that match that that have come in? Or are there invitations that we would generate where we would contact a group?

One example was that when the economy was beginning to turn around, he would come and announce that housing starts were up. At that time that was very good news. He'd go into the press briefing room, stand in front of the podium—the Press Corps would be there—and he'd say, "I'm pleased to announce that the quarter's just come out and housing starts are up." It would be barely mentioned, if at all, in the news.

So we concluded it was useful for the President to be out some place where we can have the visual story tell the message. We took him out to a construction site near Washington where there were houses that were at all levels of construction, from frames to nearly finished, and dozens of construction workers working on each of these. We set a podium right out there and he came out and announced, "Housing starts are up in America. You can see it yourself." Those stories would get more extensive play on the news. The press would send their correspondents out. There was this video that was interesting and complementary to the message. We realized that we needed to create visual opportunities to reinforce messages that he was delivering.

And it was across the board. We spent a lot of time on education. With President Reagan we did periodic polls, not nearly as many as are used in government today, but he would have a meeting maybe once a month with his pollster, Richard Wirthlin. We had a poll that came in that said, "Do you feel President Reagan is doing more to help or hurt education in America?" And the poll indicated something like 54 or 55 percent of the public thought he was hurting education and 25 percent said he was helping education.

President Reagan had a major initiative on education that he was preparing to launch. We figured, "This is an opportunity. Let's spend the next month immersed in education issues." And during that month he went out and visited schools across the country at all levels—primary schools, secondary schools, universities. He met with the Teachers of the Year in the White House. He went to the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] groups, the spelling bees. He met with the teachers' unions, a variety of activities, and delivered the same message about education. We were beginning to tire of it because we were doing it almost every day, but we realized that it was getting out to the public.

At the end of the month the next poll came in, same question, "Do you feel he's helping or hurting education in America?" The numbers had reversed themselves. Now 55 percent said he was improving education and 24 or 25 percent said that he was not. So we realized that the lesson that came away from these things was that you have to have a coordinated message, you have to repeat it, and you have to present it in venues that visually demonstrate what he was trying to convey.

That became our formula in a number of different areas. And then to coordinate the Cabinet department so we didn't have the President making a major announcement about education and the same day a major announcement about base closings or something taking place in another

department that it would overshadow. So we really worked to try to coordinate the messages coming out of all the Cabinet departments and let them know: This is what the President's going to be talking about.

At first we thought, *Is this something you need to keep a lid on? Should we disclose in advance what he's going to be talking about? What if someone knows or the opponents in the other political party know?* And we figured, what difference does it make? If he's going to be talking about it, we'll just send the message out. This is it: For education this month—or he's going to talk about defense, or he's going to talk about the environment. And we found that it worked.

Knott: Did you report to Michael Deaver, or—

Ryan: When I first arrived I reported to Mike Deaver. Then, in his absence, Jim Baker, who was Chief of Staff. When Mike left we did a little bit of organization. A lot of areas that he'd been involved in fell to me and to some other people who were there. I reported to Don Regan, who was Chief of Staff. When Regan left, I reported to Howard Baker.

Knott: Did you have any difficulty making that transition from Baker to Regan?

Ryan: No. It was interesting—

Knott: [inaudible] a term.

Ryan: They did. I came in, and I was really no one's person. I mean, I had known Mike Deaver and Jim Baker. I'd met them during the campaign. Some people who were very close on the personal staffs had been with that particular Chief of Staff for years in different positions in the government, and it was natural for them to move. And there were some who had basic differences in management styles. But it was funny—we'd have a long-range scheduling meeting once in a while, and Howard Baker wanted to come to the first long-range scheduling meeting of the senior staff as Chief of Staff. He was seated at the head of the long table in the Roosevelt Room. And he said, "You're the scheduler? I want you to know I went through more schedulers in my years on the Hill than anybody else." And I said, "Well, I've been through three White House Chiefs of Staff here so far." [*laughter*] He liked that. We got along well.

But it was different. Your question, was it difficult? It's always difficult in the White House when there's a change of Chief of Staff. This whole element of uncertainty goes around. Probably in any major company or on Capitol Hill when there's a change, at a university maybe—if there's a new regime coming in, everyone's trying to figure how they will be affected. Who's associated with the person coming in? And there's usually a request to write up your job description, what you do and what your office has been doing, and everyone's working to put together the most impressive presentation they can. An incoming team looks at those, and eventually things get sorted out and you move on.

Chidester: A lot of people have commented on how different the White House organization was under the so-called "troika," and then under Regan and later under Baker and [Kenneth]

Duberstein. As a close observer of this organization, seven years in the White House, are there any other general comments you can make?

Ryan: My feeling was that under the troika there was a clear delineation of responsibilities. Legislative was Jim Baker and political was Jim Baker. The scheduling in advance, the military office, and the First Lady—those were Mike Deaver, and generally in other areas as well. And then Ed [Edwin] Meese had the policy side of things. So there was a delineation of responsibilities. But from time to time there were rivalries, sometimes friendly and sometimes not quite as friendly, where either one of the principals thought that the other was stepping into their area, or more often, someone from the staff thought someone else was stepping in their area, or that they should have been included in this meeting. It led to occasional rivalries.

Under Regan, all power was consolidated in one place and it made decision making actually very easy. I got along well with Don Regan. Every once in a while he'd be mad at something, but he was always quick to put it behind. I found that worked well. What was important to me was to make a decision, or if it was a decision the Chief of Staff wanted to make, just to get the decision made. Regan was very good about that. Things would not just languish sitting in an in-box waiting for an answer. He'd give you a decision.

Howard Baker was the same way. Howard would defer a lot, probably more than Don Regan. Don Regan didn't want to be caught off-guard. He didn't want to be surprised and wanted to either make a lot of decisions or know that you were making them exactly in the way that he would want you to. Howard Baker was more of a delegator, having been a Senator and knowing that he could count on the staff to do different things. He'd look for an environment of friendly kibitzing, making sure that other people who might be involved in the process had given their input. He just basically wanted the decision to be made. We'd keep him informed. He didn't want to be surprised.

Ken was there toward the end of the administration, so there really was not a strong leadership style. He came in for the final few months.

Chidester: Some people have written that Mrs. [Nancy] Reagan played a key role in the White House. I was wondering if you had any general observations about her role in either scheduling or her role in the administration as a whole.

Ryan: She played an important role. Looking back in hindsight after other administrations, it's easier maybe to identify the role that she played. Her role, with very rare exceptions, was not anything dealing with policy. The only time she got into policy was if she thought her husband was being ill served or there was something that she thought was important for his legacy as a President. Perhaps because of his age when he came into office and because of the closeness of their relationship, she was more involved in being sure that he was not overscheduled in terms of the impact it would have on his health. Or on his performance. If they were traveling around the world meeting with heads of state, she would want to make sure that he had not been so scheduled and overloaded with events that he was overextended. She was concerned about that.

She was not nearly as involved in the scheduling as people thought and as the books that later came out would suggest. I was there for seven years and was Director of Appointments and Scheduling the whole time I was there. I took on other responsibilities in addition as time went on, but as the person in charge of the President's schedule, there was never a time where astrology was even mentioned. And there was never a time, frankly, where there was some odd scheduling or sequence of events that didn't make logical sense. And I know there was this impression out there that there was some type of crystal ball and she would say, "Okay, now, we'll do this next Thursday at three in the afternoon." There was never any of that.

The only thing that was a concern—I knew when a trip was coming up for the President that I should be prepared to talk to her about how heavily we were loading up his schedule. There were a couple times I remember where he did show signs of being tired when he was traveling. When he was with the Pope he was starting to doze off, and there was another event where you could just tell that he was tired. It was very important to her that he be able to function at his best, so she was focused on that. She was involved in coordinating the schedule for the events that involved both of them.

Maybe if it was something involving their friends or family she would be involved, just in terms of trying to making sure the event accommodated the interests of their friends or their family. She would also look at weekends to see if we had scheduled something that prevented them from getting to Camp David. She knew how important that was for him to be able to get out there and have a couple of days to relax and walk around in an open environment, as well as at the ranch. Although she didn't have to carry his water much until she came to the ranch because she made sure that was taken care of. [*laughter*].

Knott: Do you have a favorite memory from your White House years as opposed to your post-Presidential years with President Reagan?

Ryan: That's the thing, there are so many of them. They are different types of memories of the White House. One of the things that he did in a State of the Union Address—and this was part of the concept I was talking about earlier, presenting visual images to reinforce a message—he'd invite someone to come to the State of the Union box, usually a person whose life or whose success in a certain area related to part of his message in the State of the Union Address. Of course we had a military person up there if he was talking about rebuilding the military.

President Reagan loved heroes. He loved to meet and recognize heroes, and we were bringing these people in. These were not photo opportunities for the press for him to stand there and bask in their good will. Often the press wouldn't even know. He'd hear about somebody who had done something heroic and he'd want to thank them, shake their hand, and just pat them on the back. And these were young people—somebody who pulled somebody out of a burning house, a pilot who landed a plane that was on fire, people who had given blankets to the poor and homeless. I don't want to get off the track of your question, but it got to the point where President Reagan would send in something every week or two. Some article would come over that he'd seen about someone who'd done something heroic. He'd circle it and say, "I'd like to meet this person." And we would set this up.

I started thinking, *Wait a minute. He's the President of the United States. He has all these other things to do. Our office should be finding these things and showing them to him.* We had people whose task became, among their other duties, to look at magazines, newspapers, and local papers. Of course you'd have to determine whether the story was actually true or not. We'd bring these people in to meet the President, and he loved it. Someone might say, "Well, that was just a way for him to get good local press." Most of the time they'd come in and there would just be a White House photographer there and they would get the photo afterwards.

But to your point of a memory—in the State of the Union Address one year—it was 1985, I think—he was talking a lot about young people and about science and we had picked the heroes. My job was to help select the people who were going to be in the State of the Union box. We would always keep it very quiet. It became this thing each year where people in Congress would look up and they'd try to figure out who these people were because they wouldn't know in advance. Even in the advance copies of the speech circulated among the White House staff we would take that out, so it would avoid a chance of leaking who was going to be sitting in the box and create suspense.

We'd bring them up to Capitol Hill, which was an interesting process because even in those days it was very difficult to get up on Capitol Hill. I'd bring these people up in the car and they'd get stopped on the way in and have to show different ID. They were rousted a little bit by the Capitol police about who they were. They weren't members of Congress; what were they doing here at the State of the Union Address? Then afterwards, when they'd been on national TV, you'd have every Senator trying to get their photo with them and walking them to the door. It was instant conversion.

This particular State of the Union Address was, I think, in 1985. It was the year the space shuttle exploded. We had invited the young people in who were going to be in the box. We had a student who had an experiment on the space shuttle, among other things. And we had some young people who'd done other incredible things—child prodigies. There were about three or four of them sitting in my office. We'd invite them into the White House and just said, "The President would like to meet you and would like to invite you to come hear his speech." Even then they wouldn't know. We didn't want them discussing in advance that they were going to be the heroes in the box. So they wouldn't know they were necessarily going to be in the box. They were just thinking they were invited to the speech.

The space shuttle was about to take off, and one boy, the student, said, "Do you think we could watch it on a television set? It would be neat if we could watch the space shuttle because my experiment is on there." And I said, "Sure." We put it on because we were supposed to see the President about an hour later. We watched it and of course watched the explosion.

What normally happened leading up to the address was the President would go in and brief the network anchors in the Roosevelt Room, give them a little bit of a preview because they were all in town. There'd be staff in there for half an hour or so, an hour, then he'd come in for about 15 minutes and talk about some of the themes. He did this each year for the State of the Union Address.

I saw the thing blow up and then saw on the schedule that he was just getting ready to step into the Roosevelt Room, so I called over and got his personal secretary sitting right outside his door, and I said, "You've got to stop him. Don't let him go in there until he gets briefed on the space shuttle that's just blown up." So he stopped him and then everyone of course came up. The replays were taking place and the network anchors all went out to follow the story.

The State of the Union Address was supposed to be that night. One thing President Reagan hated to do, in his years in office and out of office, was to break a commitment and leave someone waiting or have to reschedule with someone. I got the call that he'd watched the tape and he'd done the whole message, the very eloquent address about "slipping the bonds of earth to touch the face of God."

I got a call from his personal aide saying, "You need to come over and talk to the President." "Okay. What for?" He said, "He wants to go ahead with the State of the Union Address tonight." And I said, "Okay, what's his rationale?" And he said, "Well, these young people have come into town and he doesn't know if they're going to have the money to come back again. He feels that he made a commitment to them and that he should honor it." So I talked to him first and said, "These people will come back." [*laughter*] People were saying, "This is a time for national mourning." He realized that, too, but he didn't want to leave these people waiting. So he agreed that it would be delayed for a week or two. He met them and told them how sorry he was. They agreed to come back again.

But it was very much an insight into the personal thing that I saw again and again with him, where he was so considerate of people he would not want to have people left waiting. I remember times after he left office—one day we were in Arizona and he was giving a speech to a crowd of ten thousand people or so at the university. He finished the speech and said, "Okay, we've got to go. We've got to hurry." And all the way he was in a rush back to the airport and I couldn't figure out why. Then I looked, and on his schedule there was a Boy Scout who was coming into his office in Los Angeles, and he didn't want this boy to have to wait. I said, "Don't worry. It was ten thousand people you've spoken to. He will wait." Then he wanted to make sure we called ahead and let him know the President was running about ten minutes late. He was a very considerate man.

Knott: That extended to staff as well?

Ryan: Oh, absolutely. President Reagan in every way is very genuine, what-you-see-is-what-you-get, unlike a lot of other political people. When the door is closed some politicians pound the table and scream and yell, then the camera comes on and they're smiling. President Reagan is the same off as on camera.

But I remember one story where I'd been here on a weekend. He would do his radio address every Saturday from the Oval Office. I brought people over for a tour and then let them watch the radio address. People standing there could see him do it. He needed to sign something as he was walking out. He didn't have a pen, so I gave him my pen. He signed and then left. This was on Saturday.

On Monday morning I got a call from the President's aide saying, "The President has asked for you a couple times this morning. Can you come over here?" So I came over. "What's the matter?" He said, "I don't know. He's asked a couple times if I've seen you yet." I went over and he walked in and says, "Here, I have your pen. I'm really sorry. I want to give it back to you." And I said, "Mr. President, they are *all* your pens." [*laughter*] But he was very much like that.

President Reagan loved California wine, and as Governor he'd done a lot for the wine industry. They loved him. When he left they gave him many cases of wine. Somebody who made wine came in and met with him. They had a long conversation and afterwards they told me they wanted to send him a case of their wine. They actually started sending a case every year. It came to my attention at my house rather than to his name for security reasons, so somebody didn't see this case of wine going to Ronald Reagan and then poison a bottle of it or something. So it came to my house. I would take it over and give it to Secret Service or I'd take it up to his house.

I got this call on Saturday and I was out. I had this long voice mail on the answering machine. "Fred, it's Ron. I just want to tell you, I feel so bad. I opened this case of wine, and after I opened it I saw your name on the top. I put it back together again." [*laughter*] I called him back and he said, "I'm really sorry. I hope you—I didn't mean to do anything wrong." "Don't worry," I said. I never called him Ron; I called him Mr. President. But his message was, "This is Ron." And I said, "It's your wine." He was very considerate in those types of things.

Chidester: What was your role in transitioning from the end of the second term to the Bush Presidency?

Ryan: President Reagan, with Mrs. Reagan's help, was always very organized about this kind of thing, methodically making sure that they had ample time to plan the next phase in their lives.

He and Mrs. Reagan asked me in August of '87—about a year and five months or so before they left office—if I would be their Chief of Staff out in California and help get things set up at their new office. I'd been working on plans for the Reagan Presidential Library, which he started right after his second term. He formed a committee and I was then the in-house staff person who was the liaison between the outside group of foundation trustees, employees, and the White House.

He had to have somebody who was the link, and I was asked to do that. He asked me in 1985 to help with the Library planning, so I'd been working on some things relating to his post-Presidency without any expectation or discussion about going out with him. In August of '87 he contacted me when he was at the ranch—I was actually on vacation—and asked if I'd be his Chief of Staff up there. I said, "Great. I would enjoy it." And we talked about doing it for a year. I should have remembered that was his style the first time around—that became seven years.

We went out to California immediately to look for office space for him. I talked to him about what he wanted when he left office. Did he want to retire and go to his ranch? Nobody could have held anything against him for doing that. He was in his late 70s, and that would be a natural thing to do. Or did he want to have a limited involvement? He made it very clear that he wanted to continue to speak out on the issues he'd spoken out on as President, and things he thought of as unfinished business that he wanted to devote time to.

With that in mind, we set up an office with a staff. The first few months we had dozens and dozens of people in there because he was just inundated with correspondence. We set up an office with about a dozen people on a regular basis to handle his ongoing activities. I had approached speakers' bureaus, various groups out there that arrange for people on the speaking circuit, and then we waited until he left office before he made a decision.

We were very clear; we worked closely with the lawyers to make sure we weren't doing anything that violated any conflict of interest. We had conversations, but no commitments were made. I was given the legal authority to be an intermediary on things without involving him and without making final decisions, and letting him make those afterwards. But the preliminary work would be done so he could make the decision when he left office. That involved the speaking bureau and working with people who were going to put his memoir book together—the office, the Reagan Foundation, the Republican Committee, in terms of his political activities after he left office.

I spent about a year and made a number of trips out to Los Angeles. I came back with photos of buildings and floor diagrams and sat down with him and Mrs. Reagan. We found the perfect building out there. Trying to find the right building for him was hard. How do you find a building for somebody who's just been President of the United States? But the irony was that we'd looked at it, it was our first choice, and it was fully booked.

It turned out that the top floor became open because it had just been used to make a movie in there with Bruce Willis called *Die Hard,* where they blew up the building. I went through there, and there it was—big bullet holes in the wall and the cartridges on the floor. The building owner said, "We told you it was booked because it was booked. Now they're finished and it's available." So we got the top floor of this building. It was small enough where you could have the whole floor for his personal office and staff, Mrs. Reagan's office, his library foundation, and the Secret Service. I loved it and when I came back and showed the Reagans the photos and the diagrams they thought it was perfect. The Secret Service loved it because there had just been a movie made about how to blow up this building. [*laughter*]

But part of my job was his office, putting together people on the staff, doing things at the end. Everyone in the White House is always dealing with the issues of the day, what's put in front of him at that time. At his and at Nancy Reagan's request, I started at about this year-out point looking at what should be some of the final milestones of the administration, the things to "tie it up with a bow." I think that was the term Mrs. Reagan used. State visits, for example—the very first state visit was with Margaret Thatcher. Wouldn't it make sense for the last one to be? Other things could be ceremonies honoring people, Medal of Freedom type things, nostalgic things, going back to his home town, and going back to important venues of his administration.

Knott: Did you go with him on that trip back to his home town?

Ryan: Yes.

Knott: Any memories from that?

Ryan: It was really something. The more memorable one for me was right after he left office. He went to Dixon and Tampico and Eureka College, and visited all these places. We took him out to the river where he'd been a lifeguard. He stood there and pointed out exactly where he'd rescued thirty-three people. It was very moving for him to see this.

People wondered about his speaking style and if he was starting to fade either from age or from Alzheimer's after he left office or while he was in office. The thing that amazed me was he would normally give a stump speech when he was out on the speaking circuit. We'd work with him. When he left office he was very involved in his speeches. We did a draft. He'd say what he wanted. We'd get a draft made or he'd write his own draft.

He went to Dixon, Illinois, and in the high school they had a couple thousand people there. He walked in—he had his speech that he always put in his pocket—and he said, "I'm not going to use this speech." He stood up and gave this 30- or 40-minute unbelievable speech. No notes, cards, or anything. He was telling the whole story, the journey beginning there all the way through Hollywood and his life as Governor and President, all the way without any script.

It was great, too, seeing people he'd grown up with, who of course looked much older than he did. We joked when he would go to his class reunions. It was his fiftieth college reunion, and he was like someone's son who was there. He was pushing people around in their wheelchairs and he looked like a different generation. It was really unbelievable.

But one thing I was going to say about when he went out to California—again, an insight into President Reagan—was we had the office set up, and I said to him, "You're going to want to spend a couple weeks just decompressing, right? Unpacking, doing that at home." And he said, "Yes, I probably will, just coming from Washington." We thought that gave us a couple weeks, because we were just coming, too. We sent a few people out ahead of time to get the office in order. All of a sudden, a day after he gets out to California, I get a call from the Secret Service saying the President is en route to the office. He's not supposed to be there for a couple weeks. So we scrambled and got everything ready, and ten minutes later he showed up.

He walked in and one of the things that we had not gotten right was the telephones. They had just gone in and they rang at everyone's desk, including his. We didn't realize this until halfway through the morning. He was sitting in there answering the telephone. The phone rang. "Hello, is Ronald Reagan there?" "Well, this is Ronald Reagan." [*laughter*] He had these messages, and came back out, "This person called and wants to know if I can send him a photo," or "I told this guy, if he could come in—" So we disconnected the ringer on his phone. But first off he thought that's what his life was going to be like. He thought he was back just being a private citizen, just picking up and answering his own phones. We said, "We've got people to do that. We'll screen the calls."

But the funny thing was he'd committed to all these people that they could come in and see him, and they were coming in. Of course we honored it, since he'd committed. And one guy came in and brought all these people with him, and as he was walking out, he said, "I'm going to bring

some more people back next week." And I said, "No. Wait a minute. You got lucky one time, and it's not going to be able to happen on a regular basis."

But that was his approach. He was back to being a private citizen. He was writing things up. He used to write a lot anyway. He was writing things in his own hand, figuring that they were going to be sent out like that. And often we'd retype them so it would be a little more official. But he was prepared to be just a normal citizen again.

Chidester: Did you feel that it excited him to be back in the private life?

Ryan: I think he liked it. He liked going out and interacting with people. When he was President there was always a little bit of a shield there. He liked taking question-and-answer, going to events and being able to sit at the table and talk to people around the table. So when he went out on the speaking circuit—I think most of his speeches he did without charge, but he did some paid speeches. Some of them were significant, and it was never to a non-profit. It was always to a corporation or a trade association or something, where we could explain to him that they had a budget for a speaker and for entertainment. He never charged to speak at a university, for example, or a non-profit dinner.

Anyway, he'd go out on these speaking circuit events. We would set it up where the first part would be a reception with people there. They loved it because they'd get their picture taken with him, and he loved it because he could interact. He would do the speech, maybe a 30-minute speech, and he would usually use note cards. Then he'd do another 30 or 40 minutes of question-and-answer, which he really liked. Afterwards, sometimes there'd be a dinner with some of the group and he'd get a chance to talk. These organizations liked it because they're getting people who are having dinner with the President, and their questions answered. They are getting anything they could ask for. He liked it because he was dealing with people.

I remember one of them—he went to an event at the Hoover Presidential Library, I think it was, because he was building a library of his own and he was interested in it. Of course, he didn't charge for it. We were at this event and I guess they hadn't seen a President in a long time. People were just mauling him everywhere I turned around. People went up to him sticking things in his face, "Sign this, sign that," and pulling him over. "Take my picture here." "Do this, do that." And I was able to go to the advance person and I said, "This is getting out of control. We've got to get this under control." And he said, "I'm trying. These people are so enthusiastic." And they figured he was so willing to do it, they were just pulling him. For this whole 45-minute reception, he was getting tugged every different way. "Sign this. And sign this for my other kid."

We got in the car afterwards and I remember him saying, "Now, Fred, about that reception." And I said, "Yes, I have to tell you I'm sorry." And before I could finish it, he said, "Aren't people great?" [*laughter*] When I realized he had enjoyed it, I said, "Never mind what I was going to tell you."

But in terms of his life after the Presidency, he did some international travel. He did his first trip, which—

Knott: Fred, can I stop you for a second, just before you get on these trips? Could you tell us about the last day in the White House and the trip out to California?

Ryan: Sure. The last day was really only half a day. The White House staff was so great about moving the furniture out. First they move your personal articles out, so the Oval Office would still be the way it was while you were there except without your personal articles in it. While the President's up at the Capitol for the swearing in, the new President's articles are moved in, and by the time he comes back it's his Oval Office.

But we thought about this—there were some things he wanted to do, and we had a couple of events leading up to it, some very nostalgic things. Knowing that he was leaving in advance, we thought about when the final addresses should be to the country, a farewell to the military, and a farewell address to the nation. And he did that.

On that final day we put on his National Security briefing in the morning—since he was President it was more of a ceremonial meeting—and that's the one that a quote got out. It was written about very well. Colin Powell may have had it, where he just said, "Mr. President, today the world is calm." Then President Reagan and Vice President Bush went up to the Capitol and we'd talked about what would happen up there. And incoming President Bush had said, "I want this to be as much about Ronald Reagan as it is about me. So let's make sure that it's his day, too." And they exchanged notes. President Reagan left a note to him, one of those little Post-its that said, "Don't let the turkeys get you down." He'd written a few things about this President, thoughts he had, and President Bush had a nice note back to him.

But up at the Capitol there was the swearing in. The helicopter was parked in back of the Capitol, or the East Front, I guess you could call it, right after the swearing in. President Reagan had had his finger operated on—I remember he had this contraption or something where his finger was coming down. He had that done before he left. So he had this little cast on his finger. I think it was this hand.

Anyway, after the ceremony the Bushes and the Reagans walked to the east side of the Capitol, and the staffs, the coordinators, for President Bush and Mrs. [Barbara] Bush stayed at the top. President Reagan and Mrs. Reagan walked over to the helicopter; the rest of us were already onboard. Then the President walked up to the top. The new President gave a salute. They saluted each other and you could see his saluting hand. We knew that the moving in was taking place at the White House. We wanted to take a loop around Washington one time. The helicopter took off and flew over the White House. You could see the moving van in back [*laughter*], which told the story. We went over the monuments and the Pentagon and then circled back over the Capitol one more time and out to Andrews Air Force Base.

The military had a farewell for him. He didn't want that to be a high-profile event because he didn't want it to interfere with the attention back in Washington where the inaugural parade was going on. And he didn't want television to have this split screen showing Ronald Reagan having this high-profile event at Andrews Air Force Base and the inaugural parade. So that was relatively low profile. We were out there. We got on the plane. He had those of us who were

going to be working with him afterwards and our families. He'd invited us to fly back. We had the doctor on the plane.

There's a chapter in his book where he talks about the flight back. It was very interesting. But it was different in the sense that on most flights on Air Force One, everybody is either really busy or they're acting like they're really busy. This one, people were busy, there were arrangements to be made at home, in California. But it was also more of a festive and celebratory flight where the President came back, and I had some business to take care of with him.

I had these lists of issues to talk about after he left office. One of them was the people who had donated to the Reagan Library. He couldn't know the whole time he was in office who had donated or how much they had donated. So there were different events and he knew there were people he thought were doing it, but part of our arrangement with the counsel was he couldn't know. So I gave him a list and we went through these people who had donated. He wanted to get thank-you letters off to them immediately. We talked about his speaking opportunities coming up in the next couple of weeks; they were out there if he wanted to begin this. And he said yes, so we did that.

But it was very much a sentimental flight. A cake was brought out. There are references to this in his book, too—someone said as the champagne was poured, "Mr. President, mission accomplished." And then they cut the cake and he talked about what he was going to do afterwards. But what's interesting with him—although he would always tell stories about things, he was not somebody who lived in the past. He was always looking forward. Everybody else was saying, "Well, remember when we did this and did that—" and he was thinking, *Well, I'm going to be out and I'm going to talk about the line item veto and talk about the balanced budget amendment* and other things he still wanted to get done.

Knott: So he was not sad?

Ryan: No, he was not sad at all, and Mrs. Reagan, too. It was one of those things I guess you can only—few others have been in that position as President and First Lady. They were going from the White House to be private citizens again. But they were both very upbeat. Their send-off had been very positive.

We arrived in Los Angeles. They had the USC [University of Southern California] marching band at the airport to greet him. He stepped off the plane—and again, President Reagan thought he would step off and there would be nobody there and he'd get in the car and drive himself home. There were thousands of people out there to welcome him home. He got in the motorcade and the California Highway Patrol, which had always escorted him on the motorcycles, didn't have to do it because he was no longer President, but they said, "We're going to get you all the way home." And they had the whole motorcade going out. It was a very nice, sentimental thing.

Then he got in the house and a couple of us thought, *What should we do? Do we leave him alone here?* He came in and said, "Hey, sit down." And he was telling stories to some of the interns who were driving cars in the motorcade about the line item veto and how he was going to work

on that and some of these other things [*laughter*]. He was very enthusiastic about what he was going to do next.

Knott: You started to talk about the trips.

Ryan: The trips. Well, yes. He left office and a lot of invitations came in from around the world for him to do things. And we put together one that first June. He thought he shouldn't do anything for six months, any international trip. He was very mindful of President Bush coming in and did not want to be this figure moving over the Bush Presidency. He didn't go to Washington, D.C. for a year. He said, "I don't think I should go back to Washington because it's George Bush's town. I want it to become his town before I come back." And then internationally he was very careful. He did not want to do anything that would spotlight him. In terms of events in the United States, too, he was low-key.

But after six months these invitations had come in to go to England and France, and I guess that was it on this first trip. And he went over. He'd been admitted to the Academy of Moral and Political Science in France, this very prestigious organization with only a few people admitted every few years. And then England to deliver a speech—the Lord Mayor of London had invited him to this prestigious forum and to see the Queen. He saw Margaret Thatcher, of course. She had a dinner for him in his honor at Downing Street. He gave the address and the Queen gave him the knighthood, the Order of the Bath. He was the first American President ever to get it, and it is the highest honor that can be given to a non-Brit.

Then he went to France, and again got a hero's welcome there. They had dinner for him in the Eiffel Tower and it was a spectacular trip, really memorable for him. That was in June. He found, as I suspect all Presidents would find, when you travel overseas you're treated as though you are still the President, from protocol to the response that you get, the motorcades, the ambassadors and heads of state receiving you. So he had a very good trip.

Then he did a number of domestic trips. He did a trip to Japan, I think it was November of that year, and it got an awful lot of attention for having made what, for the time, was a huge amount of money. I think people are getting that now for a single domestic speech. But he was invited over and accepted. It got a lot of negative press in that it was portrayed that he was packaged as a product that the Japanese were buying. I'd been involved in the discussions with the people inviting him from the very beginning. It was very clear that he would control all the content of the speech. He would write the speech. He wouldn't endorse any product. He wouldn't visit things that were commercial.

To this day in Japan, a lot of American actors and high-profile people appear in commercials there and it's very lucrative for them. But he decided he wouldn't get into any commercial enterprise. He would give a speech that he would give if it were to Parliament in England or anywhere else. It was two or three or four speeches total. But the way it was written up was that he was paid $2 million for a speech. The irony is that a large portion of the money went to his Presidential Library. But he was not embarrassed about it. He knew he was doing the right thing. Afterwards, it was over and was forgotten. And it was a credible group, that was the other thing. It was a media organization; it wasn't a questionable group.

Knott: Was Mrs. Reagan bothered by—there was some adverse—

Ryan: She was, because everyone thought it was so—the headlines were saying he was getting paid $2 million to give two 20-minute speeches. This was at the time when Japanese were buying Rockefeller Plaza, and it just looked like an American President had been somehow compromised. It wasn't true, but that was the spin that some were putting on it. Yes, he was paid, and he was honest about it. Yes, this is what happened with the money. A lot of stuff didn't get mentioned about the money going to the Library, about how he flew over 300 Americans, families of military folks who were stationed in Japan, then flew them back afterwards. But the facts got out and it was understood.

He did another trip, which we dubbed his "victory lap" to Eastern Europe, shortly after the wall came down. The first stop was Berlin. He walked through the wall and there was still East and West at the time. And they gave him, on the Eastern side, a hero's welcome. All of it—the sight of him at the Berlin Wall with a hammer, chiseling away, and thousands of people around—was incredible. We kept totally secret where he was going to be because he didn't want it to get out of hand if word got out that Ronald Reagan was chipping down the Berlin Wall. He went to the East and they gave him a wonderful reception. He met with the President of Germany.

From there he flew to Gdansk, Poland, and met with Lech Walesa, who was still in the shipyards there, and they had a rally for him with tens of thousands of people. Just as he arrived it started to rain. We said, "Oh, what are we going to do?" He and Lech Walesa went inside with our group for a few minutes while it just poured. We thought all these people are going to be gone. We came outside after they had their one-on-one meeting, and all these fifty thousand or so people were there. Not one of them moved; they had stuck around to see him, and they were singing a song. He was saying, "What is that song?" and they asked Lech Walesa. The translator said, "The song is called 'May You Live a Hundred Years,'" and he was very moved by that. He met with other people in the democracy movement there, then flew to Warsaw and met with people there.

From there to Moscow; he met with [Mikhail] Gorbachev and [Boris] Yeltsin. And I'll tell you, you asked about memories—one of the most unbelievable things for me with him, memories I will never forget, was in the Kremlin. He was meeting with Gorbachev and he had things he wanted to say. He had thought about what he was going to tell Gorbachev beforehand, and it was about privatizing state run enterprises. It was about American competition and privatizing his Russian factories and giving his factory workers shares so they could be shareholders in the factories, moving them toward capitalism.

It was in Gorbachev's office—they were at a table smaller than this, actually. Ambassador [Anatoly] Dobrynin, who'd been the Russian Ambassador to the United States, was there, and Gorbachev and an interpreter. Then it was President Reagan, an interpreter, the American Ambassador, and me. Gorbachev was talking and he would stop and his interpreter would translate. Then President Reagan would talk and his interpreter would translate.

Pretty soon Gorbachev was saying something, and before the interpreter could translate it, Ronald Reagan would start answering back. He didn't speak a word of Russian and Gorbachev did not speak a word of English, or very little that anyone knew of. Pretty soon, they've cut their interpreters out and Gorbachev is speaking in Russian and Ronald Reagan is speaking in English—lengthy sentences, going back and forth. "Well, yes, Mikhail, I understand you say that, but here's what I think." And then Gorbachev would say something back. A couple of us said, "I can't believe these guys seem to understand what the other one is saying." It went on for quite some time. He was saying something about privatizing the factories, "You need to give the workers shares." And Gorbachev was responding.

Afterwards, I said, "What do you think he said?" He said, "Well, Gorbachev said the people weren't ready for that. They didn't know how to manage the shares, and they would all be bought by large individuals." But this was all happening in languages the two people didn't understand. There was a certain chemistry between those two guys that led to relations between the two countries warming and the end of the Cold War. And it was never more clear to me than when the two of them were carrying on a conversation. The Ambassador and I—our eyes were popping out of our heads that this was going on.

Chidester: How did Reagan feel about the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Soviet Union?

Ryan: He was actually up on his ranch on November 19 in 1989 when the wall came down. He heard about it and came right back to Los Angeles. Everyone in the world wanted to interview him from his office about this. He called Bush, and as I said earlier, he was very careful about not wanting to step on anything, so he talked to President Bush to receive guidance on what the administration was saying and not to create a wrong message. Then he did some interviews there, but he was very pleased with it. He thought it would happen all along. It was not a surprise to him. And he could see some of the progressions of Poland and Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and these different places where it was happening.

He followed it closely. He got a lot of briefings from the administration. He stayed in touch with a lot of the leaders of the democracy movements, from Lech Walesa to [Vaclav] Havel and others who were involved in it. His speeches, domestic and overseas, after that became about the march of freedom and the collapse of communism. Looking back, no one knew how far this was going to go. Was it just going to be the Berlin Wall? What would happen next? And he was saying, "Well, I foresee this happening in Poland, and I see Bulgaria." He had the whole sequence that ended up happening. I think he was very pleased.

I've talked a little about his lack of ego—it wasn't this thing of counting, assessing, "I was right." It was more, "The people finally got a chance, and now, given the freedom to choose, they've chosen freedom." It was very much about the natural right for people to be free—it was not that he was bragging that he had stood down the communists or that the military buildup had done that.

Chidester: He wasn't looking for gratitude or praise; he was just excited that these people were finally free?

Ryan: Yes. With him it was always "we." It was never, "I did this." And I know he would talk a lot to Margaret Thatcher and they would share their enthusiasm for what was happening. But he was not looking for a pat on the back.

Knott: There was some criticism at the time that President Bush did not celebrate that moment. Do you recall President Reagan commenting on that?

Ryan: The comparison was made that had Reagan been in the White House there would have been a speech that wrapped it all together. That very first day when he came from the ranch and spoke to President Bush, there was concern about the question of unification, whether everyone expected that to happen. Of course Ronald Reagan expected it to happen. He said President Bush was saying, "This is for the German people to decide."

There *was* a concern in the State Department and the White House that this could go the wrong way if it looked like it was being forced by the West. It could stop some of the movement in other places if there was too much pounding on the chest about how much was accomplished. But he was mindful of that, even though most objective people say, as opposed to the Soviet Union, that the U.S. won the Cold War. He never did anything to make Gorbachev or the other Russian leaders feel that they had somehow been defeated or they had lost. He always looked at the positive side, that they had chosen to let their people have democracy. In some of his speeches he did say that it was the united and unrelenting will to bring freedom around the world that led to this; it wasn't just an accident.

Chidester: Around this time the Soviet Union is beginning the first stages of its collapse as well. President Bush initiated the more cautious approach to the Soviet Union as opposed to Reagan, who had such a strong focus and vision as far as U.S.-Soviet relations. Did he ever comment on Bush's approach? How he felt about the caution that the new administration seemed to be taking?

Ryan: No. He genuinely liked Bush personally, very much liked him. I know he also institutionally felt that he was no longer President and that George Bush was now his President and he was not going to second-guess him. There was not a single instance that I know of when he was out of office where he either publicly or even privately tried to influence President Bush to do something a certain way. I think he felt that he was no longer the President, it was somebody else's turn, and that it doesn't help being in there having somebody second-guessing you or criticizing you. At least with President Bush he didn't do it. With [Bill] Clinton he did. He did a couple of carefully thought-out pieces about some of Clinton's disastrous economic proposals, but he didn't try to influence things with Bush or criticize him.

Knott: Gorbachev paid a visit to the Reagan ranch at some point. Can you tell us about that?

Ryan: Yes. It was terrific. He and Gorbachev had become personal friends. He invited him to come to his ranch. We were up there that day. I think Gorbachev had these huge expectations that it was going to be this giant place, something from the set of Dallas—a huge country estate

with paved corrals and all that. Reagan's ranch was very small and simple. The ranch house is 2,400 square feet, not huge. The ranch is 680 acres, I believe, with very little of it developed.

He invited Gorbachev up for lunch. President Reagan had bought a ten-gallon cowboy hat to give to him, and Gorbachev put it on backwards. You could see in the photos he didn't quite have it on right, but President Reagan showed him, and it was very friendly. They didn't get into a lot of policy discussions. But he put him in his jeep and drove him around the ranch and showed him different things—fences he'd made, trees he'd cut, and the views. Very friendly, almost like two old classmates getting together. They spent the day together and talked about their families. He enjoyed it.

One of the things he always said he really wanted to do with Gorbachev was to get him up in an airplane or helicopter and fly over a major American city and show him all the swimming pools down there and all the houses, and say, "These are the houses of the working people. These are not the houses, as you have in the Soviet Union, where the Communist Party elite have houses and everyone else lives in these huge cement skyscrapers with minimal space."

Almost every time we got in a plane with him he would say, "I wish I could get Gorbachev up here and show him this, because he would see—" He didn't do that with Gorbachev, but he did take him to the New York Stock Exchange. It was on that same trip that he came to the ranch. There was an East Coast part and a West Coast part to it. They did a couple of things together on the East Coast, and one of them was to take Gorbachev to the Stock Exchange.

Knott: One of the more difficult moments in the post-Presidential years was when the President had to testify in the [John] Poindexter trial. Could you talk about how he prepared for that or what role you might have played?

Ryan: Yes. We thought there were a lot of political aspects to this, and institutional aspects. The first request from independent counsel was to have Ronald Reagan come back to Washington. They wanted to do the whole thing at the courthouse. President Reagan's counsel—who was very good—was Ted Olson. He is now Solicitor General. Ted Olson and I and others felt that that was neither the right venue nor the right scene for a former President to testify in Federal court. An arrangement was made—actually, this came up two times. Once was the Poindexter trial, and once was when independent counsel wanted to depose President Reagan. At the Poindexter trial an agreement was made. Judge [Harold] Greene would do it in the Federal courthouse in Los Angeles.

President Reagan sat down the day before with Ted Olson and talked about the facts. I don't know if he'd ever given a deposition or testified before—maybe in his Hollywood days, but it had been awhile. What we saw on the tape there was Ronald Reagan's personality revealed. The guidance from the lawyers said, "Just answer yes or no. Don't say anything. Don't offer any information. You are a witness in the trial." But he was trying to please the guy asking the questions, trying to come up with some answer that would help him. It was not a lawyer-like deposition. He wasn't trying to define what the meaning of "is" is, or anything like that.

Unfortunately it was taped, and the tape was played over and over again. It was hours long. They showed him photos and documents. They showed him documents that he'd never seen before and said, "Do you remember this?" And he kept trying to remember. Turned out he'd never seen them before and he couldn't remember, but he was trying to be helpful. They asked him about a couple of people, and hours into it they asked him about someone he couldn't remember. I don't think that had anything to do with Alzheimer's or anything. I think it was out of context and after asking a lot of detailed questions about Contras and things like that.

There was a second one where they wanted him to come back to Washington and the independent counsel again wanted him to come to the Federal courthouse. Ted Olson negotiated an alternative: rather than a deposition in Washington, it would take place in President Reagan's office out in Los Angeles. It would be an interview with a court reporter there. The funny thing was that the independent counsel came out—[BREAK]

Knott: Do you mean [E. Lawrence] Walsh?

Ryan: Walsh came out first, and they had a lot of negotiations about where it would take place and who could be in the room because of all the security issues involved. It was finally agreed that President Reagan would be there. Ted Olson, his counsel, and I would be there as a lawyer. My clearance was still in place. Then he would have some people on his side.

They sent people out to look at the room. The security people came in and did the windows so no photos could be taken in of the confidential documents, and they swept it for devices. They came in and sat down with President Reagan. Walsh picked up this stack of documents stamped "Top Secret" and showed them to the President. "Do you recognize this?" "No, I really don't." It turned out most of these were documents he'd never seen, let alone, you wouldn't recall if you'd seen these things four years earlier. Walsh showed him this series of documents and he said, "I just don't recall seeing those." And as I said, most of them he hadn't seen. They were from one person to another at the State Department or elsewhere.

He didn't want to be there, but he was very cordial with Walsh. Walsh left and packed all his documents up. We learned later that Walsh had gone off to the airport to fly back to Washington. He'd checked all of the classified documents as luggage, and when he arrived in Washington it didn't come off the chute. A couple of weeks passed, and finally one of the documents appeared in the *New York Times*. Walsh, who actually had violated the rules on confidential documents—you're supposed to report immediately that they're missing—reported in. President Reagan wasn't trying to make anything out of it, but it was just interesting how—

Knott: There was also a meeting at one point with President-elect Clinton. I wonder if you have any recollections from that day.

Ryan: Yes. It was interesting on a couple of fronts. One was that President Reagan was not a fan of Clinton, did not support him, and wanted Bush to win. He spent a lot of time thinking about what he was going to talk to Clinton about. He felt they didn't have a lot in common. He made this list of three things and thought about it before Clinton came.

One of them was to salute the military. He started that when he got off the helicopters. He always felt uncomfortable when the military guard would be standing with this crisp salute and he would wave, so he asked them—you may have already heard this story. He asked the Commandant of the Marine Corps, "I feel uncomfortable. These men are saluting when I get off the plane. Is it all right if I return the salute? I'm not in uniform." And he said, "Well, you're the Commander in Chief. If you want to return the salute, you can do it." So after that he got off with a crisp salute to these guys. He passed that information to Bush 41, and he did it. Then he thought he would pass it on to Clinton. So that was the first thing on his list.

The second thing was getting away from the White House on weekends and going to Camp David to decompress, get out in the open, and walk around because the White House is a fish bowl.

The third thing was interesting—to revive the Grace Commission, the private sector commission on cost control in the Federal government. There were a number of recommendations that they put together, this list of hundreds. And only the first portion of them had actually been implemented. The others were still there as opportunities for cost-saving and efficiencies. We had a group of smart business people in both parties looking at this. It wasn't a partisan thing. Now Clinton would be able to do some things. He inherited all this work and he could put it into place. Those were the three things on his list.

He was waiting for Clinton to come, and he was supposed to come at a certain time. President Reagan was actually a little bit fascinated, almost intrigued. He'd never been on the receiving side of a Presidential visit. The guys came up with the dogs walking through the office first, the bomb-sniffers, and he thought that was neat. He followed them around. And then the SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] team came up, and he thought that was neat and he talked to them. He saw all of the lead-up to this. And we never thought about it. When Bush came it was always more low-key, I guess. Bush would tell the guys, "Don't worry, I don't need all these dogs." With Clinton it was early, while he was President-elect, and I don't think he knew what preceded him. So the full security thing happened. These guys came in and swept the room and everything.

Clinton was supposed to arrive, I think, at around eleven o'clock. So President Reagan, who was right on time for everything and would not keep people waiting—10:55 he's standing there, ready and waiting. Then it's 11:00, 11:15, 11:20, 11:30, and he's still not there. Finally I had to ask the Secret Service, "What's happening?" It's now almost 40 minutes late. When it was 40 minutes late, he could see the motorcade. From our building you could see in every direction. It was a very tall building, and we were on the 32nd floor. You could see the Clinton motorcade and the helicopter flying over. He'd never really seen a motorcade from that perspective, and he could see the helicopter and the lights and count how many cars were in the motorcade.

Clinton came up to the office, and to me it was oil and water, right there when they first met. Bruce Lindsey was there with Clinton and I was there with President Reagan. They sat down. President Reagan had his list. Bill Clinton was in classic Bill Clinton form. He walked in and said to the secretaries, "Thank you for what you do," and, "Keep up the good work." He was working his way all the way in, still in campaign mode.

He came in and saw President Reagan, and President Reagan told him the three things. He said, "I've thought about three things that maybe you could do." And he said, "Yes, I think I'm going to do all three of those." Then he said, "I have a fourth one I'll just throw out that wasn't on my list. If you could get the line item veto, you would be ready, you could do very well." Clinton came back with a very political answer. "Well, I think I've got the votes here to get a modified version I could at least call the line item veto. It won't be the line item veto you want, but I think I can get this right now and I can call it a line item veto and can claim that I've got a line item veto." You could tell that he was looking at the political spin of things and Ronald Reagan was looking at it from more of a pure level.

I think he gave him a jellybean jar, but you could tell that the chemistry was just not there between the two of them. It was interesting. Clinton was a little bit nervous, actually. I guess this guy had been President for eight years while he was Governor, and he was in awe of the success of his Presidency. He was a little bit nervous, but they never really hit it off. Clinton said he was going to call him anytime he dealt with foreign leaders. And sometimes he made the gesture. I think he was going up to meet with Boris Yeltsin, so he called President Reagan from the airplane on the way there just to say he'd touched base with him. But he didn't really seek any guidance from him. They were two very different people.

Knott: Was it unusual for someone not to click with Ronald Reagan?

Ryan: It was unusual. Most people would come in a little nervous, and he had a way of making people feel very comfortable. It wasn't something where you could tell President Reagan was uncomfortable, it just seemed like two different personalities. He had a regular flow of people—members of Congress, Cabinet members, and foreign leaders would come to see him when they were in town. Even foreign leaders who were not in office when he was but were now in office wanted to come by and pay their respects. He would get a lot of those requests, and we would schedule them because we wanted to. He wanted to stay active and busy. Mrs. Reagan did, too. So he had a pretty full schedule. Someone not clicking with him was a little bit unusual.

Knott: During President Clinton's first year in office, President Reagan writes this public letter criticizing the proposed tax increase. How did President Reagan feel about the Clinton administration as it progressed?

Ryan: During the campaign President Clinton had run as a centrist in a lot of ways, and I think President Reagan felt that he was going to be a little more in the center. I'm forgetting the exact details of that letter. Wasn't it an op-ed piece or something that he did for a newspaper? He'd worked on it himself. He just felt that his policies had made so much progress over the years that it would be a mistake to go back. I think he did two or three different op-eds about things, primarily about the economy and taxes.

Chidester: Taking you back to the Bush-Clinton race of 1992, did Reagan play any role in President Bush's re-election campaign? I saw that he gave the speech at the '92 convention.

Ryan: He did. He did appearances for him. I remember, particularly in California, campaign appearances for Bush—and then several with him. The one he did at various places—I can't think of the exact locations right now, but he did them during the election year—then some joint appearances in Orange County, California, and elsewhere.

The convention was a big thing, for one, because for Ronald Reagan it was his first convention address as a private citizen again. It was very important for him to give his support for Bush. I know he went to Texas—this was the convention that a lot of people to this day regret that the program got out of hand. They had a lot of people on there, Pat Buchanan and others with him, talking about culture wars and negative stuff. And it was supposed to be the buildup, and Ronald Reagan was supposed to give the finale address. The earlier speakers went on too long. I remember being underneath the stage where there was a holding room, with President Reagan waiting to give his speech. They told him, "You're going to speak at 10:00 P.M." It's 9:50 and there are two speakers to go in front of him.

It wasn't an ego thing, but I remember him looking at the camera. He wanted to use his speech to give as firm an endorsement as he could of George Bush because there were some who were saying that they were split or they were mad at each other or whatever. That was his mission, to do that. And if you look at that speech, he says, "I wholeheartedly, 100 percent—" as many words as he could use to say that he was endorsing him. But he was down there looking at the monitor and he could see people moving around. He thought they were leaving. But in reality what was happening was—unless you're the keynote speaker, a lot of people just walk around the convention. It never really stops, never really gets quiet unless it's the President's speech or, in this case, Ronald Reagan's speech, or the nomination speech or something.

So he was underneath there and he was concerned. There were a bunch of us in the room and we could tell that Mrs. Reagan and President Reagan were getting concerned. Time was passing, his speaking moment was coming up, and they were going to drop out on the East Coast coverage. Slowly, one by one, all the people who had been in there to be part of the moment had disappeared and I was under there with him. They were anxious to go out. Finally I went up to Craig Fuller, who was the convention chairman, and said, "You've got to put President Reagan on now. Shut off the microphone or whatever it takes for these guys." President Reagan got up and had a fantastic speech. He'd worked a lot on it himself. But it ended up being past deadline in Eastern markets. So it didn't get on the air in some parts of the country.

One interesting thing about that speech was at the end he talked about what he'd seen in his life and his hopes for America's future. He ended by saying, "God bless you and goodbye." All of a sudden all the applause was going on in the room, but there was this sudden thing. It was, *Wait a minute, he just said 'Goodbye.'* Ronald Reagan was never heard to say that. It was always, "Goodnight," or "Until next time," or whatever. And it turned out to be his last Republican convention. It wasn't planned that way. He always just ended his speeches himself. It wasn't teleprompted to say goodbye instead of goodnight. But it was one of his moving addresses. There are books written about his great speeches, and that was certainly one of them.

Chidester: We've already mentioned the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. There are a couple other major world events that happened during the Bush Presidency, and you were

possibly the closest observer of President Reagan during this time. If I could run down a couple of these events—just any comments that you have on them. I guess the best place to start would be the collapse of the Soviet Union in '91.

Ryan: Well, I remember when—it was right around Christmas time, wasn't it?—he was very happy. There was a Christmas dinner or something in California with family and friends of his. I remember President Reagan being moved and they showed the Soviet flag coming down. He was talking about how this was the triumph of good over evil. He didn't have to say a lot because a lot of people were saying things anyway. Ronald Reagan had once called them the "Evil Empire," whereas now they acknowledged that it was an evil system and they were getting rid of it. Some of the things the commentators had said were "unrealistic."

Like the Berlin Wall. I remember when he gave a speech at the Berlin Wall. If you've already got enough on that you can stop me, but when he was going to Berlin he said, "I want to say 'take down that wall.'" He met immense resistance from the State Department and the NSC [National Security Council]. It's funny; there are probably a hundred people out there who have told me that they're the ones who wrote, "Tear down this wall." There were a handful of people on both sides of this, and the State Department was resisting it.

The only person I know who will admit that he was against it being in there was Howard Baker. Howard Baker said he was a practical politician, and you don't ask for something that can't happen. He didn't want it in there, and he was overruled, and he humbly admits that he was wrong on that.

But the "tear down the wall"—there was an awful lot of back and forth. Finally the President said, "I'm doing it." There are different versions the speechwriters gave him, but I saw the process unfold. I know that just before the speech—President Reagan would tell this story often—they took him to the Reichstag, where you could see over the wall, and they gave him a pair of big binoculars. He was looking over the wall and he could see East German police pushing the crowds back. Word had gotten out that Ronald Reagan was going to be speaking at the wall, and they really couldn't see it. They wanted to be within hearing range of it. And the East German police were pushing them back.

It made him mad. Maybe it was part of his days as an actor, that his audience was being driven away. It was partly the fact that he had an important message and these Communist police were stopping them from hearing it. It made him mad, and that's how he delivers the speech. He really punched that line about "Tear down this wall" because he was angry and he wasn't hesitant about showing that. He admitted afterwards that when he saw those people pushing them back, that really got him.

But I guess then your question about the fall of the Soviet Union—he was very careful not to gloat, and he gave Gorbachev credit. Whenever he'd go out and speak, somebody would say, "Well, it looks like you beat Gorbachev." In his question and answer he would always say, "No, this couldn't have happened were it not for Gorbachev. Gorbachev is leading this transition." He was very willing to let the credit be shared.

Chidester: President Reagan is a very humble man, but he had been fighting Communism for four decades.

Ryan: Right.

Chidester: Privately, did you feel this sense of accomplishment, even if it wasn't outspoken?

Ryan: Oh, he was very happy. And he wove together all these incidents as the experiences he had with Communism, from the Screen Actors Guild to the police learning that they were going to try to put him out of business as an actor by throwing acid on his face. They gave him a permit to carry a gun. And he saw Communism firsthand, in his eyes, as a threat. He was very happy about it because that was the first thing people would say when they'd see him, "Nice to meet you, President Reagan. Congratulations. Thank you for defeating Communism, particularly without the use of military force." He was proud of it, but it was not something that he would gloat about.

One thing about President Reagan is he would probably be a very hard subject for you to interview because he was never introspective. He would talk about, "the people did this, and they—" I was in there for a lot of interviews with him. It was very hard to get him to talk about himself in terms of his Presidential policies. He'd always take it out of himself.

Knott: Was that true when it came to his memoir as well? Did he have difficulty sitting down and talking about his life? I've heard this said by—

Ryan: Well, it was a challenge. On the one hand, he was very disciplined. Some of these later books that came out with the letters show that. He wasn't just sitting around watching TV. At all times he was doing all these things. But he took it on. Right up front he said, "All right, I'll do it." He knew what he was getting into. It was hard for him to talk about himself. It was more the events. He would talk about the events that unfolded and how he saw himself in there, but there wasn't a lot of the stuff where he'd say, "Well, here's what I was thinking at the time." It was more, "This was said and so I said this, and this is what I'd hoped we could do."

But to do the book—I think he was relieved when it was over. He had the writer who was working with him, I've forgotten—

Knott: Was it Robert Lindsey?

Ryan: Robert Lindsey, yes. He'd done *The Falcon and the Snowman* and a couple of good books. But it was a little hard at first because I think Lindsey thought the President was just going to sit and ramble on about himself, and then Lindsey would put it in biography form. It was a little more of a challenge to get him to talk about himself. So we'd take his calendars for each year and put those in front of him so he could recall what was happening on each of those days. He even had his diaries. He kept this handwritten diary, which was used for him to refresh his memory but was not put into his memoir. So he had a little bit of a challenge on that.

I know he was done afterwards with his books because I approached him. He always had a joke—if you came in to meet with him, you'd have a nice meeting and at the end he'd say, "Oh, by the way—" and he'd have some story or a joke, to either loosen things up on the way in or to leave people with a thought. It was just his way. Some of these jokes were fantastic. I said, "You should do a book of your jokes." And he said, "People call me afterwards and say, 'What was that joke? Can you tell me? I want to write it down.'" Sometimes I heard them more than once because if he liked one he would tell it to a lot of people. I could remember some of these because I heard them so many times. I said, "You should do a book of jokes." And he said, "Nope. I'm not doing another book. You do a book of my jokes if you want to." Because I had told him about how people wanted it.

I started off doing this book about his jokes. I realized as I was going through all the speeches that there were more meaningful things there than just jokes. So it ended up being put together as a book of his quotes. And it had some jokes, some more patriotic things, and more of his vision. After it was over, I gave him the first copy. He liked it but he said that he was glad that he didn't have to do it. And then I donated the proceeds from the book the Reagan Library.

Chidester: What about the free elections in Nicaragua?

Ryan: He was pleased with that. In fact, right after the election, I know the White House was keeping him closely briefed on what was happening down there. As the elections were taking place, some of the Democratic leaders came up to see him, and then after the elections. He was very pleased when the woman who won down there—whose name I've forgotten—

Knott: [Violetta] Chamorro.

Ryan: Chamorro, yes. She came up to call on him in Los Angeles, and he was very pleased. Obviously, the low mark in his administration was the whole Iran-Contra time, and in a lot of ways it didn't address the issue of [Oliver] North and the diversion on the Iran side, but at least on the Contras it showed that his belief that free elections could take place had proven true.

Chidester: How about the Gulf War?

Ryan: I'm trying to recall now. I know he was very careful at that time not to say anything that could look like he was second-guessing Bush. He'd had his military incursions, which at the time had seemed rather significant because we did not have a full-scale war. We had Grenada, then the bombings of Libya. In those situations he was very careful. He would always say that the toughest part of his job was ordering a combat mission. He had some very moving quote I included in that book about how you had to realize that people were going to die and you had to deal with the families who were affected by it, and even in the best of circumstances there would be casualties, and that when he gave the order that that meant that he was essentially deciding that some people on the American side were going to die. He was very solemn about that.

Bush called him and kept him informed. He told him that the invasion was going to be taking place. We had a secure line set up in his office and a secure fax so he could get briefings and

calls. He was very supportive of the invasion. I know he thought he did the right thing. He was still out on the speaking circuit and spoke in support of this.

Chidester: In November 1994 President Reagan writes his farewell letter to the nation. Was there a point where you began to notice that Reagan had been slipping? Maybe signs of Alzheimer's?

Ryan: Now we know that he has Alzheimer's. At the time we knew that he was a guy who was 80-something years old. Now with the benefit of hindsight we can say, "Oh, that was probably Alzheimer's."

I was around him literally every day and the first time I noticed was in early 1994. He had come back to an event in New York, then he had come to Washington for an event, a birthday party in February at the National Building Museum, a huge thing filled with people. He was fine before he left on the trip, and when he got to New York, I think with the combination of jet lag and the change in environment and the travel, he just seemed a slight bit out of sync. It wasn't a problem; he was totally able to connect with people. But something just didn't quite seem right. It just seemed like he was having a really bad case of jet lag.

He came on to Washington and he did the event here at the Building Museum. The jet lag was worse. In the hotel he was a little bit disoriented about, "Which way are we leaving again?" No one thought it was Alzheimer's. We thought it was age complicated by jet lag. When he gave his speech that night, it was a very a big deal, a Republican fundraiser. It was raising lots of money for the Republican Party. It was a black tie deal and Margaret Thatcher was there.

As he stood up to speak—that was the worst moment of the whole thing—he didn't realize the teleprompter was there. He was looking at the cards and having difficulty reading his cards. I don't know if you've seen the video. It starts off very slowly, one word at a time. And we were sitting in the audience, thinking, *What's wrong? Something is not right here.* We were dying actually because of the full press coverage. We thought this was going to be a humiliating moment. Then all of a sudden he looks up and sees the teleprompter. He takes off and his speech was as good as ever.

The rest of the time he was back in Los Angeles he was fine. We did trips and built in more rest on the trips. Don't fly in some place, arrive there at midnight, then get up the next morning for a nine o'clock breakfast. We would keep the day free until two or three in the afternoon, until you can adjust to jet lag. Because he did more after that. We didn't realize that that was the problem. But the first signs were early '94.

He did another trip, which was one of his best—his final public speech down to Charleston to a military academy there, the Citadel. It was terrific. It was his last public speech and he had no problems on that trip at all, no jet lag issues or anything. It was a very moving tribute to the military. It was probably fitting that it was his last public speech.

That summer he went to the Mayo Clinic. I'd gone with him every year. He was very health conscious. In the White House and before he was in the White House he'd have a physical every

year, and Nancy Reagan would, too. He went to the Mayo Clinic for a two-day executive physical exam. He would go there for a full check-up. I'd just hang around.

The doctors said, "We're seeing memory loss that we think is more than just age related. They did a series of tests where they would tell you three numbers and a color, then they'd have you read a book. You'd come back and they'd say, "Now what are those three numbers, and what's that color again?" It was a whole battery of things. But they didn't know what it was. He'd had that accident where he'd been thrown off a horse a couple years earlier. They thought maybe it was something relating to that.

To this day, Alzheimer's is only diagnosed in an autopsy, or maybe by now some sophisticated brain scan. But at the time they didn't know if it could be some type of hormonal problem, a tumor, or what could this be. So they sent a doctor friend of his out to Los Angeles to spend a few days and observe him.

Knott: Was this Dr. [John] Hutton?

Ryan: No, Dr. Hutton had been his physician in the White House, a friend of his who had also been helpful on this. I can't remember the name of the doctor. Dr. Hutton had been, by the way, in Washington on this trip. He and I talk about it, and he remembers the problem being a little worse than I remember it.

The doctor came out and they sat down and said, "We think you have Alzheimer's." It was Saturday morning, and they had concluded the test. They told Mrs. Reagan that's what they thought. I came over to the house and they sat down and told him. And he said, "Okay." I was there to talk about what he wanted to do about it. Since he had Secret Service protection, he could have basically just kept it secret, not had any appearances, and just retired to his ranch. It never would have been proven.

But he said he'd had the problem with his colon cancer and he'd gone public about that, and there were all these people who were taking colon screening. He got letters when he was at the White House from people saying, "I've been saved from colon cancer because of you as a role model. I got the checkup." And the same with Mrs. Reagan when she got breast cancer. Women went in for more checkups and they said that they had been saved early. And even when he had his hearing aid—he got the hearing aid, which now is not all that big of a deal, but 15 or 20 years ago, when someone got a hearing aid they were admitting they were older and that they had a problem. But he got it and he got all these letters from people about the hearing aid. Since the President of the United States would wear one, they were going to wear one. These wives would say, "Now my husband can hear me again."

But anyway, he said, "We helped some people before, so I'm just going to go public with it." I was in there talking to Mrs. Reagan and the doctor for a while, and President Reagan went to a little table by the window in his house, in his library, and he wrote this letter. He came over and he handed it to me. And he said, "Why don't we get this typed up and put it out?" It was like I was saying earlier, he wrote his own letters all the time. I said, "Well, if you want to put it out you don't need to type it up. Why don't you just put it out in your own writing?" He said,

"Okay." It was released that day, and he went on to his ranch, where he was planning on going anyway, with Nancy Reagan. He was planning on living a normal routine as long as he could.

I know at that time he was totally in control of his faculties. It was more of a memory problem, of not being able to remember a lot of facts, as opposed to being confused and disoriented. He wrote a very clear letter. And he was going to continue doing what he had been doing. But the next time he had a public appearance, the press was all over him. He was nearsighted, so he always wore contact lenses. If you came by his house at night he'd have the contact lenses off and he'd have his glasses on. They were big glasses. He did an event and for whatever reason he was rushed in the morning and didn't put his contact lenses on. He wore the glasses. It was one of the first times the public or the press had seen him with his glasses on. They were zooming in on these glasses and the story became about these glasses. Are they something he wears because of Alzheimer's disease?

He realized that from then on, the story was going to be him and not whatever group he was out there for. So he began to pull back. He still did a few things. I was obviously still working for him then, and we decided when he did resume to keep a full schedule and see people in the office, but anytime he did something public it had to be spontaneous so they couldn't know and couldn't have a press stakeout.

We'd take him to restaurants, he'd show up at events, but people wouldn't know in advance he was coming. He did that for a while, then slowly began to phase back. He made it clear right from the very beginning that he wanted people to remember him as they had known him. He didn't want to continue if he thought he was going to deteriorate or degenerate. He didn't want to continue to be before the public eye and have them watch it happening.

He gave the example of Bette Davis, the actress, who was so beautiful when she was young and then when she became very old she kept doing these appearances and didn't even look like herself. Maybe because of his old days in Hollywood he knew when it was the right time to exit the stage. I tell you, though, nobody thought—Mrs. Reagan included, and any of us who were involved—that it would be ten years and that he would still be going strong, that he would still be alive. We just didn't think that at the time.

Knott: When was your last contact with President Reagan?

Ryan: It's probably been three years since I've seen him. He stopped going to his office. Mrs. Reagan was very concerned about keeping him active. For a while when he was in the office he'd continue to have appointments, but they were not real in-depth, substantive type things, where somebody would sit down for half an hour or an hour and talk about the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] or complicated legislation. It would be simple things, people he knew from his school days, friends, or people who'd worked with him.

He had a policy that started the day he arrived in California and continued until he stopped seeing people that any person who ever worked for him, anyplace—Sacramento, Washington, Hollywood, wherever—any person who had worked for him could see him if they came by his

office. And there were a lot of people who worked for him in his administration who had never met him until they met him afterwards.

So we had a lot of those appointments. Groups would come in and have photos and talk for a few minutes, but they slowly moved away from the substantive type things to the point where he had very rare visitors, more just close friends because he didn't want to be embarrassed if he repeated himself in a conversation or something. Then finally he and Mrs. Reagan thought it would be best if he stayed at home. He's been doing that for about three or four years.

Chidester: Could you comment on Mrs. Reagan's role in this as caretaker?

Ryan: Sure. If you look back to the earliest days, she's always played a caretaker role in one form or another, as we were talking about earlier. She was a protector, whether protecting him from being overly scheduled and worn out, or protecting him from people. Since he always is the optimist, always sees the best in people, there were times when people would ask him to do things that were really more for their agenda than for his or for the country's. He would always trust people and she was the one who could sense when someone had ulterior motives. So she was protecting him in another sense. It got people mad at her, staff people. She became unpopular with people because they would think they could get the President to do something, then all of a sudden it would get stopped. They realized that she had heard about it or she had told one of us who worked for him about it and it got stopped.

She's done that caretaker role. And they're very close anyway, just as a couple. The two of them, you can just tell. When they're together they're really together. They're watching TV, sitting next to each other; they're just very close. That comes across, too, in his diary, by the way. Anytime she was gone it would say, "Only four more days until Nancy's back. Only three more days—I can't wait until she's back."

As I've already said, she's played that caretaker role in different forms whenever he's had an accident or after surgeries. After his shootings she was there personally caring for him, and after his horse accident, cancer surgeries. I think she realized, and he realized, as soon as he learned he had Alzheimer's—he even mentioned it in the letter he wrote—that there was going to be a hard role for her to care for him. She realized that that was her role. It's really been her finest hour in the sense that she has totally changed her life. She would love to be in New York and traveling, going to Europe, to see all these friends with beautiful estates and houses around the world, enjoying life. She's got all the invitations to do it, but she does not leave him. She stays in Los Angeles.

The only time she's left there in the last few years has been for something on his behalf—to come to the dedication of the *Reagan* aircraft carrier back here, or to receive the Congressional Medal, the Medal of Freedom. And that's it. She stays at home with him. She's got good nursing help. She's with him all the time. She doesn't want to be away if he needs her. If something should happen to him, she wants to be at his side when it does. But she's tried to continue his work, and that's where I've been working, on the Ronald Reagan Library. That was something that was important to him and to her, and she's trying to keep that going.

Knott: Did you read the Edmund Morris book, *Dutch*? Could you give us your assessment of it?

Ryan: I thought it was a hugely missed opportunity. I was the liaison between the White House and Edmund Morris. I sat in on every one of the interviews he had with the President. The way the deal was done—Mike Deaver was just leaving the White House and he had been the link with Edmund Morris. I was asked to pick that up.

He had so much material, and not just from the interviews. President Reagan decided to cooperate fully. There were people who knew President Reagan who wouldn't talk to Edmund Morris. He wrote them letters asking them to talk to Edmund Morris so this full record could be written. I went to Edmund's apartment several times because we were always saying, "Edmund, when is the book coming out?" It took ten years. He'd show me these boxes, a table of this size covered with shoeboxes with file cards, and every single file card having a quote or an anecdote or some facts about President Reagan. It was the most extensive compilation of material I've ever seen on somebody, maybe that's ever been put together on an individual. He talked to everybody, not just Reagan's friends, but his friends' friends—Edmund left no stone unturned. He was given clearance by the White House, he came to meetings, and he was at economic summits. All the information was there.

There is a whole issue that was wrong with his inserting himself in it and the direction that he took. But the thing that bothered me even more than that was his material. It just never made it to print. It was a missed opportunity. I think he never really understood Ronald Reagan.

Knott: What did he not understand?

Ryan: He didn't understand the essence of how anyone becomes President in the United States. If you look at his book, it's all of a sudden Ronald Reagan was President. He was an actor and then he was President. He doesn't understand the campaigning and the fire in the belly and all that that takes, the cross-country and connecting with people, and all that.

We got along with each other very well during the process. But I'd just say Edmund can be a bit cynical. I think he was always looking to see that there had to be this dark side to Ronald Reagan that he hadn't quite broken through to yet. He just had to think it was there, and it wasn't there. I think he misread it.

The other thing is I think Edmund knew his subject so well that he became, in a strange way, negative or vindictive toward him. Contempt might be the right word. Familiarity breeds contempt. He knew so much, so many facts, but he couldn't quite connect with him emotionally. He kept thinking there was something there that wasn't. It comes across in his book and some of the other pieces that Edmund has written.

I talked to Edmund and asked him if under any circumstance he would—after his death if that has to be the test—turn his research material over because for scholars at some point, now or 50 years from now, there is this treasure there.

Knott: Was he receptive to that?

Ryan: No, not right now. The book came out and all the people who were naturally there to buy it, the Reagan people, said, "Ugh, I'm not going to buy this thing. It's just not right." Then a lot of the people who would normally have rushed to defend it, in the biographical and historical community, thought he'd committed a sin putting himself in the book, so they weren't there. And I think Edmund went through this difficult period. I know he's gone on and he's doing other things now. I think he's angry about the book.

But it was a huge disappointment. The other reason I'm disappointed about it is not only was all that material that Edmund got just lost someplace, hopefully to be recovered some day, but we cleared the decks. Once Edmund Morris had the official mandate to do the biography, all these other people, noted scholars and people who'd had biographies on the bestseller lists, just stepped out of the way. Or we told them, "Sorry, we're trying something different here. Edmund Morris has the exclusive." So these other books weren't done.

Then all these people came forward who really didn't have the material or the stature to do a book. There was a whole series of books that immediately followed Edmund's, none of which was of the caliber that might have been if we had not gone with Edmund and had found somebody else or just let a bunch of people do it, let half a dozen different people do the project.

Chidester: Is there anything else about Ronald Reagan in retrospect that we as historians have either gotten wrong or we just don't know about him that you can fill us in on?

Knott: Think of somebody sitting 50 to 100 years from now reading this transcript. What would you want to say?

Ryan: Well, one thing is that there was this impression that Ronald Reagan was lazy, that he would read the script and then go back and sit down and someone would tell him what to do, and at the end of the day he would go to bed early, sleep in late. Anybody around him knows that he was always working and always reading, and there was never dull, idle time. And the letters that he wrote were spectacular, as you know, the ones that you've seen in the book.

The other thing is he loved to write things, either long form or letters or even short things. When a picture was taken of President Reagan on a trip, for instance a trip to Berlin, two weeks later these photos would come back that were taken along the way, all the pictures of him on the plane and then the event. He'd get these photos and take some time and write something funny on there. It wouldn't just be, "Best wishes, Ronald Reagan." It would be something funny about the picture or about him. I think that told a little bit about what type of guy he was.

I guess I've probably thought more about the personal side than any of the policy stuff, but the policy material is out there. The speeches are there and the White House papers are there. But one thing about him was that he was somebody who was exactly the same whenever it was, on-camera, off-camera, whether he was with a head of state or with a Boy Scout troop in his office. They all had the same full attention and respect.

Chidester: You mentioned that there was this notion out there that he was lazy. I think there is another misconception. And that's about his intelligence. Could you address that for the historical record?

Ryan: He was far more intelligent than people gave him credit for and had a far better memory and grasp of facts. I remember one circumstance at the end of his administration. For his final Republican convention we were putting this film together about him, called *The Reagan Years.* We had these guys from New York who were very good and they helped us do it, a very emotional type of thing. They asked him a question, "What do you want to be remembered for?" I told them, "Ask that last, because that's the toughest one you're going to get." And he said, "Oh," and he hemmed and hawed and said, "This is something for the future."

They asked him this question outside in the Rose Garden of the White House, and we had done some parts of it in the Oval Office and parts in other places. He gave this long, detailed answer—again, it was not an introspective thing—about his belief about how goodness will prevail in the end and about the rights of all people. It was probably a five- to ten-minute answer.

As soon as they were done, the guy who had the audio on said, "We have a problem. There was a buzz on here. I couldn't get that." The person who was interviewing him said, "Do you think you could repeat that?" And he repeated it exactly. It was not some canned stump speech; it was not something that I'd ever heard him say before. He just went through, word for word. And that's not his favorite subject, to talk about himself, as you remember. So people have raised the question about whether he had any signs of even early Alzheimer's in the White House, it was the final few months in the White House. So that, for me, removed any doubt that came out a few years later.

But in terms of his intellect—a lot of times we'd travel with him. Three or four of us would have dinner. There was nothing to prove, no outside people there. He would get into these detailed discussions about history and what has happened going back to ancient Egypt, philosophies and economic policies that worked and didn't work. One guy who would travel with us sometimes, a character named Mark Weinberg who worked in the Press Office, he would always try to bait the President, saying, "Well, this such and such policy never worked." It would start him off and President Reagan would give detailed explanations. So I know he had the brainpower there. He loved to read. He kept his mind active.

I think as time goes on—one thing we're doing, by the way, is his diary. "We," meaning the Presidential Library. We're going to publish his diary sometime in the next year or two. When that comes out people will see. Since it's written day by day, it's not in any long form, so I don't know how much it'll do in terms of demonstrating his intellect, but it'll certainly show his level of engagement in each day, what he's done, and what he's looking forward to.

Knott: We have to let you go very soon, but could I ask you one last question? I'd like your assessment as to how somebody who seems to have been utterly without guile or without ego went as far as he did.

Ryan: I've wondered about that. I think it's a couple of things. One is, Ronald Reagan was driven, and not in the usual sense. Driven is usually a negative term. It usually means somebody is ambitious for the wrong reasons. He was driven for the right reasons. I mean he believed in things. A lot of it was his upbringing, growing up in the heartland and in a different era than we're in now. He had principles. He would not yield on things; they were fairly narrow. He didn't try to cover the whole universe, but he had specific things that were burned into his soul. There was no way you could convince him otherwise. He refused to compromise on those.

Part of the reason he got as far as he did—he's so free from guile, as you say—is that he genuinely likes people. There are a lot of people in the political business who really don't like people, but they know they've got to go out and shake 200 hands and they've got to pat people on the back and ask how their kids are doing. He genuinely liked people and had the disposition to do it. He didn't view it as a chore but as something that was a pleasure. And he had phenomenal communication skills, so he could engage people.

Obviously from the podium that was demonstrated constantly. But one thing that would always amaze me is when he would go out to an event—some of the speeches I was telling you about earlier—he would go into a room for the reception beforehand. There might be 150 people in there. The staff would joke how long it would take before the circle would form. We walked in and he would be there, and a couple of people would be standing at the other end and he had stopped with two or three people talking. Pretty soon there would be four or five standing around and he'd be saying something. Within ten minutes, the entire room would be this huge circle around him and he'd be saying things and engaging all of these people. He had this unique ability, not just on television, which is necessary today, but one-on-one.

Politics can be a rough business. He had people who worked for him through his Governor years and Presidency. Not that they had the dark side that he lacked, but they knew how genuine and trusting he was, and they were on guard for it. They were the defense out there waiting for someone to take advantage of it. So he always had people, from Nancy Reagan to those others who worked around him who were mindful of that and tried to guard against it.

[BREAK]

Knott: One of the things that Morris talks about is a kind of "wall." He paints Reagan as a somewhat distant, almost cold person. I was wondering your take on that.

Ryan: Cold is not the word I would say. I keep coming back to that. He's not very introspective in the sense that he's not somebody who would sit around at an encounter group and want to talk about innermost insecurities. He doesn't think that way. He's just not made up that way.

Unlike most of us, President Reagan had no interest in gossip, the unseemly side of things, or hearing that, "so-and-so, despite what you think, has really got this problem." Edmund's personality—I think he almost thought there had to be some type of cynicism or that side to

people or you had a wall up. I sat in on all the interviews, taped them all, and you can see him baiting these things, and President Reagan was just not understanding and not connecting.

The only credibility I would give to what Edmund says about this wall being up is that President Reagan has been so confident in himself—not arrogant, by any means, but confident—that he does not feel this need to somehow derive things from other people, where he has to feel like he's saying something that's going to win your support and please you. He always does because his interest is pure. It's hard to put your finger on.

And he's an optimist. Sometimes he doesn't show the emotion that the rest of us would show about something. You could say that that is a sign of being remote or aloof, but I just always took it as being optimistic. There were times when—I remember specifically— some newspaper article would come out critical of him. Those of us working for him would be slamming the doors and pounding the table. We'd tell him about it and he'd just say, "Oh, well, that's what they'll write," and he'd move on to the next thing. And you might say, "Well, this guy's pretty cold. He doesn't even care." But the reality was, in my opinion, that he was confident and was not going to let other people affect how he felt about himself or ruin his day or anything like that.

Chidester: Some people said that he was just content that there was this greater plan, this divine plan that was playing God in his life. Did you ever have any discussions about that?

Ryan: He always felt that goodness and right would prevail in the end. Again, it was this optimism. He was religious, too, in the sense that after he was shot he felt that he lived because God had things he wanted him to do. Not that he suddenly took this type of messiah or holy complex or anything, a "God told me to do this," type thing, but I think he just felt that there were things God wanted him to do and that's why he survived the shooting.

He felt that there was a greater plan because of his religion. That may be why he dealt so well with adversarial circumstances when they came up. Adversity certainly came up, like learning he had Alzheimer's. For somebody to be told that they have a terminal disease, then write an eloquent letter about it and continue living life as best they can is somebody who is confident in himself and the idea that things happen for a reason.

Chidester: Going back to the Morris book, is there any account out there that is particularly close to what you feel is the real Ronald Reagan?

Ryan: The best stuff—

Knott: Other than your own— [*laughter*]

Ryan: That stuff is, though. [*laughter*] I think his diary will do well when it's published—it's him. When he wrote the diary, it wasn't written with the idea that it was going to be published. He wrote the diary because when he was in Sacramento at the end of the eight years, he and Nancy Reagan sat down and said, "I hardly remember much of what happened. It flew by so quickly." So they both did these diaries. He did it in six volumes and there are thousands of pages.

I think the best insights into him are that and the letters, the Marty Anderson book, the letters he wrote to people. A lot of the letters didn't end up in this book since they were sent. In order to be in one of those books there had to be a copy made or the person who received it had to turn it back. But there are the letters he wrote to his children about taking care of themselves and living healthy lives.

Every once in a while a letter would still get through to President Reagan. He'd be at an event, walking into a restaurant, and somebody would say, "Here, my kid wrote this letter to you." He'd come in on a Monday morning and he'd say, "Could you guys mail this for me?" And there'd be this three-page letter back to some little kid who wanted to know what it was like to be President, what it was like to be a movie star, or what it was like to have surgery, or anything like that.

Knott: You and others have mentioned his sense of humor and a lot of jokes. Could you tell us any particular anecdote where his humor was revealed? Can you tell one of his jokes?

Ryan: Well, he loved the Russian jokes. He used those. These weren't jokes that made fun of Russians, they were jokes that Russians told about themselves and among themselves. He would use those with Gorbachev. He would hear the jokes and he would remember them. When I was there at meetings he had with Gorbachev, he'd say, "Mikhail, let me tell you this story I've heard."

Knott: Did Gorbachev appreciate this?

Ryan: He would laugh. And some of them involved Gorbachev. One thing is not a joke, but it'll tell you a little bit about his optimism. There are two things, actually.

We were flying on a trip from Los Angeles to Arizona for a speech. We were on a plane with a pilot and co-pilot; two Secret Service agents; Mark Weinberg, who I mentioned earlier was his Press Secretary for a while in California; and President Reagan. We took off in a Learjet. He was speaking to a university, I think. One of the things we'd say is that when he spoke to a group they'd have to get somebody to provide a jet to get him there. You'd want a jet you could almost stand up in, not one of these really small planes where you couldn't move around. But it turned out this was a non-profit he was speaking to. He was helping to raise money for a children's home or something. Somebody on their board had this Learjet and said, "We'll send it to you." So we said, "All right, that's fine." It was small, but he didn't care. We said, "It's only an hour flight, it will be fine."

So we take off on the flight. President Reagan always liked to eat on time. He liked to do everything on time. He wanted to eat at six o'clock. We were taking off and the plan was to eat on the plane. There were these box dinners sitting there. He saw the box dinners and said, "With the pilot and co-pilot, who's going to serve us those dinners?" And I said, "When we're airborne the co-pilot's going to come back and give us those." And he said, "Okay."

We were about 15 minutes into the flight, and this plane is bouncing all over the place. Wham! Up and down, very severe turbulence. We're looking at each other. And of course, we're

laughing, and pretty soon everyone had these stone faces on. We're flying all over the place. We can't see anything; it's night. And the guy next to me leans over and says, "This isn't looking good." We're all thinking—*Oh!* And President Reagan says, "Yeah. We're not going to get those box dinners." [*laughter*] So here we are, wondering if we're going to land. And he thought we were going to land, he's just worried about where the box dinners are going to come from.

The other one was almost the flip side of that, though. For years President Reagan did not fly. I don't know if you've heard that when he was doing GE Theater, he had this feeling that if he flew, he'd be in a plane crash. Later that day a plane crashed, and that gave him a sense that he shouldn't be flying. For a long time he just didn't fly. He took the train everywhere he went. All of a sudden he felt it was fine to fly again, and he's flown ever since.

He had a pair of cufflinks that Nancy Reagan had given him—the ones you've probably seen. They have a little stone on a certain day. There was a little stone on March 4, which is their anniversary. He would wear these cufflinks any time he flew. It was almost a standard joke in the White House that when he got on the plane he'd say, "I've got my cufflinks on." When we flew with him afterwards on the smaller planes, he'd get on the plane. "Do you have your cufflinks on?" "Yes, I have them on." It was our joke. "Then we're safe."

We took off on this one flight from Cincinnati—he'd done a speech and was flying from Cincinnati to somewhere else an hour or so away on this Gulfstream. When we arrived at the airport they said, "Sorry, because of thunderstorms and visibility the airport's closed, but we think we're going to have a window in about 15 minutes when it's going to open." So we waited around and then I said, "We don't have to be the first ones out of here. We can wait until it's fully open." And they said, "No, it's safe." And the pilot said, "It's safe." Everyone said it was safe, and so we took off.

The plane takes off and as we're climbing up, five minutes into the flight, we were getting thrown all over the place, bouncing up and down, really rough, startling turbulence. And all of a sudden, people ask, "Well, are we okay, Mr. President?" And he reaches down and puts out his cuffs, and he's got the wrong cufflinks on. And everyone just got very solemn—including him,. He was caught off-guard. I was thinking, *Here it is, this plane's going to crash. "Ronald Reagan and five unknown staff members died—"* but it leveled off a little while after that. He'd left the cufflinks at home or something. He took them from then on.

But he always used to have a joke. I think it was from his Hollywood days, where they would stand around a lot on the sets and fill time telling a story or a joke. He had a phenomenal memory for them. I'll hear a joke and remember it for a while and then I'll forget, or I'll remember pieces of it. And he would hear it and would recite it in perfect form. He always had one. He'd use jokes as a great way to break the ice with people. And it was. It came across that he had a good sense of humor. People hearing him tell jokes, they could just tell that his demeanor was one that he enjoyed laughter and a sense of humor.

Knott: This is a difficult question, but do you have one particular memory that's a favorite of yours?

Ryan: There were some very serious moments. I tend to remember the funny ones more because I repeated the stories afterwards to people more. I remember, actually, two—one funny one and one sad one.

The sad one was when Nancy Reagan's mother died. He heard in the Oval Office and he wanted to go over and tell her. He was very solemn about it and very concerned about how she was going to react. I've forgotten exactly how he said it. But you could just sense this feeling in the room once the word came in about it, and that he was going over right then to talk to her. He went to the residence and told her about it. It was very difficult for her and for him, but he wanted to tell her.

The funnier stories, as I said, are the ones I remember more. I don't know if you guys ever heard about the guy who came in to arm-wrestle him in the Oval Office. We used to bring people in to see him, these heroes I told you about earlier, interesting people. And I got a letter from this guy who wrote in saying that Ronald Reagan was the most fit President in American history. They'd actually researched it and documented President by President what they did for exercise and how long they lived and anything they knew about their dietary habits. He concluded that Ronald Reagan was the most fit President.

I gave him letter this in a cross-section of his invitations, particularly some of the funnier and more entertaining ones. He really liked this one and came back saying, "I'd like to receive the award." They wanted to present him with an award in the Oval Office. The guy who sent it in—they had sent some photos along—was one of these super bodybuilder types.

So we set this thing up and the guy arrives. First off, the photos of the bodybuilder were very old. He was this big fire hydrant now. But he had this book. I told him it was a five-minute appointment with President Reagan, and I stood standing over to the side of the Oval Office.

Baker was Chief of Staff then and Deaver was Deputy Chief of Staff. They were both out at the Bohemian Grove in California. So I was technically responsible if something happened. I figured, fine, we'll pull this reading thing off so there's no risk of anything happening. The guy comes in with the book and starts reading President by President what they did for exercise and health. He got through [George] Washington and [John] Adams, and I said, "Wait a minute. Let's move up to the twentieth century." So he flips up and he's got Teddy [Theodore] Roosevelt and starts going through those Presidents and what they did. I said, "Let's move up to the '70s." So he flips forward.

President Reagan was enjoying all of it, just hearing this thing and standing there. Finally the guy reads about Ronald Reagan, the most fit President in history. He said, "Now I want to present you with the award." He unfolds this thing and there's this picture that he's had an artist do of Ronald Reagan and him standing there, both with super muscleman bodies and little bathing suits on, hands holding a torch or something up. We said, "Great. Give it to President Reagan."

He's getting ready to leave and says, "Mr. President, one more thing. Would you like to arm-wrestle?" And I say, "No." And President Reagan says, "Sure." And they clear off the desk. They're over there, and he's moved the secure phone and they're doing this arm-wrestling thing.

President Reagan was trying, and he won. I don't know whether the guy let him or not, but he was red-faced. He was pushing.

The photographer was in there clicking pictures of this, and I was standing in the background with the President's military aide. We dove out of there because we did not want to be in the background in case we could be fired when the Chief of Staff got back. The body builder guy leaves and I turned to the photographer and said, "Look, this never happened." And he says, "All right, this never happened. We'll cover for each other." [*laughter*]

A few minutes later we get a call from Larry Speakes, who was the White House Press Secretary at the time, and he said, "There's a guy standing outside the White House saying he's just arm-wrestled the President. There's nothing to that, is there?" [*laughter*] And I said, "Well, yes." And I told him what happened. He called me back and said, "The networks have heard about this thing and they want the photo." And I thought, *Jeez*. So we have this photo—you can see two guys jumping out of the way in the background and they're arm-wrestling. That night, in the evening news, was the classic Washington lesson, at least for me. It said, "In a carefully orchestrated event to show that Ronald Reagan is not too old to be President, the staff organized this arm-wrestling."

But the funny thing was he loved it and said, "I really beat that guy." He was serious about it. That was important to him. There are a lot more historical moments than that, and that may not be what you were looking for, but that's some personal insight into him.

Knott: Thank you very much for your time.

Ryan: I enjoyed talking to you. Good luck on the rest of the project. Where are you with the sequence of people? Have you got more to come?

Knott: We've got James Baker, Holmes Tuttle, Alexander Haig. But we are nearing the end of the project. We have about 40 to 45 interviews. The material should be open in November 2005. We'll keep you posted.

Ryan: As I said at the beginning, I'm so glad you're doing this. It's great for history's sake. I know in doing in the Clinton and Bush ones, you've got probably more people alive from the administrations around here, and the memories are a little fresher. I'm glad that you're doing it; otherwise it would probably never get done.

Chidester: One of the good things about the Reagan people, being the furthest President that we're doing, is it's really good for candor. You get a lot of honest appraisals. I'm reading the transcripts now and it's really been amazing for the history of this President. It's going to be an incredible project. I'm very excited to get it out.

Ryan: I look forward to it.

[no question on recording]

Ryan: Ronald Reagan was the oldest President. I came back here to start my job, thinking it was going to be a bunch of old guys with white hair around him. And he had the youngest staff—I was 26 and I was not the youngest. There were other people there who were younger than that in these positions. Most of us were the youngest who'd held our particular position. The Administrative Office did research on other Presidencies. We thought that the Kennedy administration probably would have had a younger staff, but it turned out that they didn't. They were a little bit older. I suspect that the Clinton administration was younger because a lot of people there were in the middle of college and right out of college. So probably the average staff age was younger. But until that time, Ronald Reagan, the oldest President, had the youngest staff.

Part of it was that he was very much young at heart, and secondly, you have to be energetic. It would be very difficult to be married with a lot of kids and be working the hours there. But because it was a young group of people, you worked long, long hours every day of the week. There was always a friendly environment and people got along well. We were constantly doing practical jokes that you probably couldn't do today, but they broke the tension. Jim Baker was aware of a lot of those things we would do. The President was not oblivious that people were working 14-, 16-hour days, and he would try to make the environment as accommodating and hospitable as he could.

But the biggest single thing that amazed me about the administration in the beginning was just how young people were.