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Diane Blair Interviews Project

Interview with

Judy Green

Campaign Position: Director of Personnel

Little Rock, Arkansas

October 28, 1992

Diane Blair: What were you doing immediately before you joined the campaign?

Judy Green: I was doing what I will be doing as soon as the campaign is over. I work at People for the American Way, which is a public interest First Amendment freedoms group in Washington and I'm director of personnel there. I came to the campaign at the request of Eli Segal, the chief of staff, who said they needed some help in personnel matters and résumés and were being overwhelmed with résumés and people responding so generously to the Clinton candidacy. So I came down to help.

DB: As director of personnel, what do you do?

JG: Shortly after the convention, I dealt with thousands of résumés of people who wanted to lend their efforts to the campaign, and also dealt with housing—housing the hundreds of campaign workers who came to Little Rock, which was wonderful, actually, in retrospect. I loved it because I got to meet so many nice people in Arkansas.

DB: You obviously have come to the conclusion that the decision to stay here was a good one.

JG: Oh, I think it was brilliant. And I thought it wasn't smart in the beginning, and I think it was brilliant.

DB: Why?

JG: Because I think that people focus much better, and there is less distraction here. I think he was less accessible to all the downside of Washington. And I think people got to know his hometown and to know him through that. And it's a fabulous place. Most people knew nothing about Arkansas.

DB: And came with fear.

JG: Truly. And it's just been a wonderful surprise. And it's a wonderful secret you all have here.

DB: I remember when our fax machines were getting loaded with people faxing résumés, and they were all so impressive. How on earth did you sort through all that?

JG: Well, most of them were impressive as you said. And a lot of them wanted to do work in their states, so we sent those to state directors. And we sent the ones that wanted to come to Little Rock to the pertinent issue people here and they made their selections. So that was that. And ones that weren't selected—we urged them to be in touch with their state directors to help them in the state effort.

DB: This campaign is now being described as the most effective presidential campaign in recent American history. What, from your perspective, made it so effective?

JG: Well, one, that we've been ahead in the polls the whole time. I think that's very

pertinent to all this. And there seem to be very defined areas of responsibility, and I think because we have the winner and, God willing, will be on November 3, that people have managed to stay in their areas of responsibility. There clearly seems to be strategists and management, and those things seem to work nicely together because there isn't much of a problem.

DB: I find that fascinating, because one of the things that you hear a lot of talk about is that there does not seem to be a strong organization here. And yet you're saying . . .

JG: It all works. And I do really think it all works because we're ahead. And I think that if things weren't going as well as they've gone, there could have been tremendous impasses, or whatever, because of that kind of loose structure. If you look at it—if you look at each person, Eli does a brilliant job with management and fund-raising. Brilliant. Stephanopoulos and Carville and those people have done a fabulous job. And Ricki Seidman, of message and also of quick response. So they've kept the focus, without question. Even times when it was hard to keep the focus. It's been—I mean it's worked that way. Mickey Kantor's done his special projects with the vice presidency and the transition, and it's worked very nicely.

DB: Have you done presidential campaigns before?

JG: Just one [McGovern] at this level—in this total immersion, just that one.

DB: And that was . . .

JG: A long time ago, yes.

DB: So comparisons would not be particularly relevant?

JG: Not for me, except for hearsay. And I hear from other people who were in Dukakis, the difference is extraordinary. People who did quick response for Dukakis and do it here say it's such a world of difference. They're much more focused here, much quicker to turn around and not to let a single fact go unchallenged, or statement go unchallenged.

DB: When were you certain that Clinton would get the presidential nomination?

JG: In May is when I started to take him seriously. Mario Cuomo was my choice, and I was very disappointed when he didn't do it. And I was interested in Tsongas, but not committed to him—curious about him. I don't know Bill and Hillary Clinton, but everyone I know knows them, so I'm surprised that I didn't. I'd never met them. I've just never heard such glorious praise about someone. I mean, people think he's a very brilliant, gifted man, and I was curious about that. And I also admire greatly, and learned a lot, even at my age, from him about how he handled all the Gennifer Flowers and draft stuff. It was amazing that he got up time and time again. And it's so wonderful. I keep telling my kids that it's the way you do it. You fight back and you get up and you go on. I was really impressed with that. His letter—I mean, the Vietnam letter—was extraordinary. It was a turning point for a lot of people, that letter, do you know? I mean, people who hadn't really looked seriously at Clinton.

DB: When were you certain that he would win the presidency?

JG: It's my Greek heritage that doesn't allow me to say that he's going to be, but I think from the way he handled the adversity in his campaign, I believed that his message would prevail and that people would take him very seriously and

understand. And when I saw him stand with Al Gore at the Mansion the day they announced, I looked at that ticket and I said, "It takes my breath away, that ticket. It is so strong and energetic and just speaks of the future. These bright men, so committed." I just thought no one can look at that ticket without voting for it. It would be very hard to not feel inspired by that ticket.

DB: What in the course of all this has been a low point for you?

JG: I haven't had one.

DB: You've been here for the good times.

JG: I've been here since June and I can't think of a low point. We kept saying, "Wait," you know, "it's all going to hit the fan next week, after this, after that," and we kept waiting and the polls are going to narrow and the polls are going to narrow, and so far . . .

DB: They're narrowing, but they're not terrifying.

JG: Right.

DB: High point? Do you have anything that stands out in your mind?

JG: My daughter [Melissa] who also came to work in the campaign has had a glorious exposure, and people have been wonderful to her. And she's learned and watched, and it's been fun for the two of us to live together without my husband and our other daughter. And so it's interesting. She said that she dreaded the thought that I would make her clean up all the time. And she said, "Mom, living with you is just like living in the dorm." which is the ultimate praise. I'm embarrassed to say it. You should see our apartment. The other thing I just want to say, because I met so many wonderful Arkansans here, and I met some women

who were very active in fighting Faubus. Do you know Sara Murphy and Jean Campbell?

DB: Yes.

JG: And I just was so impressed with these women and their courage. And they had so much to lose. I mean, we northern women were active, but we had less on the line. So when I was in SNCC, it was okay to be in SNCC. When they were, it was not. And it was impressive, and I can't tell you what meeting these people meant to me.

DB: What is it that you want to make sure the future understands about this campaign?

JG: I don't know what I want it to know about the campaign. I would guess that I think Bill Clinton is the most important—and I don't mean that to sound trite. I do think that he probably is great. I think that he might be great. And I think that I am honored to have been a part of the campaign of what I think is going to be a great man. I don't know, but I think so, and I haven't thought that in a long time. I think there are other men and women who could have run for office, who would have been good presidents, but I think he could be great.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]