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## **Diane D. Blair Papers (MC 1632)**

### **1992 Clinton Presidential Campaign Interviews**

Interview with Mary Anne Salmon  
Campaign Position: Arkansas State Director  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
December 2, 1992

#### **Overview**

Diane D. Blair was an assistant professor of political science at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, when she took a leave of absence to serve as a senior researcher in Governor Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. Approximately one month before the November election, Blair obtained permission from the governor to conduct interviews with participants in the Clinton/Gore campaign. In her own words, ". . . I had two major purposes in mind: first, simply to preserve for posterity an accomplished campaign organization that would essentially disappear on election day; and second, through discussions with campaign workers from all departments, to see what those on the inside believed to be the key ingredients of the campaign's success." She prepared a list of questions and began interviewing people as schedules allowed.

After Blair's death in 2000, her husband, Jim Blair, donated her personal and professional papers to Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries. Mary Anne Salmon reviewed this transcript and granted permission to make this interview available to scholars, students, and researchers. The final document may contain edits requested by the interviewee. This transcript was processed as part of the Diane D. Blair Papers and prepared for publication by the editorial staff of the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.

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[Beginning of Interview]

Diane Blair: When did you begin the responsibility of being Arkansas state director?

Mary Anne Salmon: About mid-November 1991.

DB: What were you doing immediately before you joined the campaign?

MAS: I had briefly retired from service with Bill Clinton after the 1990 campaign for governor, and after working the legislative session for him. I bought a new house and was having a wonderful time, then back I came. There is something about Bill Clinton that when he calls and says, "I need you," you are called back into service again.

DB: Whose idea was it to have an Arkansas state director, and what did this job include?

MAS: I think it was the consensus of a lot of the people who were involved with the campaign, and Bill and Hillary in particular, that we needed to get someone from Arkansas because we have such an organization in Arkansas and have had it so long. It's like one big extended family. There were a lot of new people in the campaign, and the people who worked for Bill Clinton for so long—no one knew them and they didn't know anyone. They decided they needed someone who knew the organization to be here available for them to have a contact. Judy Gaddy and Kay Goss and I had pretty much done the entire state in the past, but both of the other two were on the governor's staff, and so I was the only one available. That's why I was picked.

DB: Do you think that there was a full recognition at the beginning of just how important a part of the whole campaign the Arkansas component would be?

MAS: No, I really don't. I don't even think to us in Arkansas—although we felt like we were pretty special, I don't think we really realized how important a part we would play. I think after the campaign progressed and, particularly, when the character issue came up, we were able to start promotion with our group. Go out and talk to people about the real Bill Clinton that we knew. Most of us had supported him so long. I think it was good credentials that we had. Because we were so loyal and we were willing to pay our own way to go and tell people about the real Bill Clinton, it changed a lot of people's minds.

DB: You're talking about the Arkansas Travelers, which is part of what you did. Do you remember whose idea it was, or did many people have the idea of the Arkansas Travelers?

MAS: By the time I came, they had already talked about it. I don't know if it was Hillary's idea, or whose idea it was, but they had already talked about having Arkansas Travelers because—maybe it was the Peanut Brigade from Georgia that sort of gave them the idea, I'm not sure. I know we've been compared a lot with the Peanut Brigade.

DB: To what extent was it that we had so many people who wanted to do something? I was never clear whether any of those people were recruited.

MAS: To my knowledge, we had to recruit very few, if any, people because, from the time I came on, at least, people were calling me saying, "What can I do?" The word got out that we were having the Arkansas Travelers. Then they started

calling and saying, "I want to go," or, "I want to go to this state. I have kinfolks here and I want to go to that state." I think we had an endless list of people. I don't think all the people really got a chance to go. Even as many went, there were still others.

DB: Do you know how many states they ended up going to?

MAS: No. In the primary, I know we went to New Hampshire in force. Then I went to Georgia and organized a group there. That was the second state we went to. Then we went to Illinois. Before New Hampshire we'd sent a group, not necessarily as Arkansas Travelers, but we sent them to the caucus in the straw vote in Florida. We also, prior to Super Tuesday, sent people to Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Kansas, Missouri, New York. I think they sent some to North Carolina. Everywhere. Then a huge crew went out to California.

DB: So you oversaw the Arkansas Travelers? You were the contact point with Arkansas people of the campaign.

MAS: I kind of oversaw the Arkansas Travelers. I worked with them more in the primary. In the general, things got so hot and heavy and Sheila had done a lot of promotion of the Arkansas Travelers, so she more or less took over that portion of it. There was a lot to do in the general.

DB: Of course, there were all the Arkansans involved in the convention, which had to be orchestrated and organized. You had major responsibilities there. Would you describe how you had Arkansas people attached to each state caucus? I thought that was a wonderful thing. Whose idea was that?

MAS: Some time after the primary, Sheila, Bill Trice, Sam Peroni, and I met and sort of talked about what had been good with the Travelers and what hadn't been good—the problems we had had. We decided some ways that we wanted to shape things up. As we got ready to go to the convention, we decided to have Arkansas ambassadors to each state to meet the people at the convention who were obviously for Bill Clinton and then work with those people throughout the general, too. But Sheila was responsible at the convention, organizing that portion. We all met and were assigned states. Usually, we were assigned in pairs. Every morning we were responsible for going to that state and meeting people—visiting with them answering questions about Bill Clinton. Really some of our people struck up real good friendships with people in those states. They are looking forward to seeing them at the inauguration. We took materials to those caucuses about Bill Clinton. Later, some of those people during the general campaign traveled to those states and visited with those people. In some cases, their state conventions. It was an ongoing thing to work with those states as the ambassadors and sometimes the Travelers would go to those states during the general.

DB: There was also the effort of getting people who were going on vacation to come by and get their Clinton kits.

MAS: Right. After the convention, Hillary, Skip, Sheila, Craig and several people from Arkansas met—David Watkins. Hillary was real excited about people going to other states and telling the people about Bill. She thought that the Arkansas people could best take care of it here. We came up with the little campaign, “I’m

from Arkansas, ask me about my governor.” We had bumper stickers, buttons, and T-shirts. We did a little kickoff in the newspaper.

DB: Do you know how many people did that?

MAS: We don't. We started out keeping a tally of that, and it got up way into the hundreds. We completely sold out of T-shirts.

DB: People had to buy these?

MAS: Yes. The T-shirts were \$10. We did give them a little packet with two bumper stickers and two buttons, the Arkansas Record, and sent them on their way. We had people who came in that had had the best time, felt so good because people had seen their bumper sticker or the button and would pull over and talk to them. I wore mine on the plane going somewhere and people would say, “Well, tell me about the governor.” They were very effective. We had the best feedback from it.

DB: We also raised a lot of money in Arkansas.

MAS: The loyalty in Arkansas to Bill Clinton is unreal to us who *live* in Arkansas.

People outside Arkansas just cannot believe it. When most of the outsiders, or the people from other states came down to Arkansas, they did not expect what they found as far as support for Bill Clinton here. Any time anything had to be done, they would call and say, “Can you do this?” I'd say, “Sure.” I'd call all of our supporters and they were always so supportive and so willing to do whatever Bill Clinton needed them to do. They just hopped right on it. I know for New Hampshire in twenty-four hours time, we had done an ad for the paper. We called

people and asked them if we could use their names and put their phone numbers in the New Hampshire paper for voters to call and ask questions about Bill Clinton. We completely covered up a double-page spread in twenty-four hours. We also did a project during the New Hampshire primary—about a couple of months before the primary, maybe a month and a half. We sent packets to all the coordinators in the state. According to the population of their county, the number was decided. We sent that to them and inside was material about New Hampshire, material about Bill Clinton, some stationery, and a list of phone numbers and addresses. Those people wrote letters to the New Hampshire people, introducing themselves and telling where they lived in Arkansas, something about their community, and just a family visit letter or friendly letter to people. Then they followed it up in a week or so with a phone call to those people. They have had a lot of people call them back, and a lot of the people that went to the convention saw people they'd written to. Also, there were a lot of elderly people involved with it. It was people who couldn't get out, or put up signs, or didn't have enough money to contribute. This was a way that they could participate. There were a tremendous number of people that wanted to help Bill Clinton from their homes. It was a good way for them to do it.

DB: I can remember some other events, too. Occasionally, people from this area would provide meals for the campaign. So many people wanted to do something.

MAS: They really did. We had a lot of the Democratic county committees provide meals. They came from as far away as Russellville. They brought fish fry. The

kids that came down were just working for nothing. They were having to pay for a room and food and they were always welcoming some home-cooked food. It didn't last long.

DB: A lot of those kids were taken in by Arkansas people, given a place to live here. That was something else the Arkansas people contributed.

MAS: It's just been amazing to me.

DB: How many thousands of Arkansans would you estimate played some part in this?

MAS: It would really be hard. I know our supporter list is something like 40,000, but I think this time, because it was the presidency, we had people who had never actively done anything before. I think 50,000 or 75,000 people did something. It might have been a little thing, or something larger. There were so many people after events, after the New Hampshire primary and then after the primaries in general. Then after the convention and every time some big event would happen, more and more people would flock to the phones calling to see what they could do to help. They were willing to do anything. Another thing I want to interject, I was talking about how loyal the people were to Bill Clinton. Every time we asked them to do something, they rallied and did it. But the people outside of our state did not realize what good friends Bill Clinton was with the people, how we were all just a big family. Some people went to some of their organizations and people would ask about Bill Clinton and then they would say, "Do you really know him?" One in particular comes to mind is Lester Hosto, a pharmacist. He went to a pharmacy convention. He was telling me recently that they would say, "How do



you know Bill Clinton?” He said, “Well, he’s a friend of mine.” They kind of acted like, “Oh, yes, you’re just telling us that.” It kind of aggravated him a little. So not long ago Bill Clinton was out one morning and he ran into the McDonald’s place. Lester and his son happened to be near there. They went in and he had a camera and had his picture made with Bill Clinton and he took it to the next national meeting and said, “Now you’re going to believe me. Here’s my friend.” People really, I think, don’t realize what a warm, folksy person he really is. So it’s surprising to them that not only is he warm and folksy, Arkansas is a small state and we’re friendly with all of our politicians. It is surprising to people that we’re real people.

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

MAS: I think the major component is Bill Clinton. You cannot outwork Bill Clinton. I think that maybe one reason the people who support him are so willing to do whatever they have to is because they know he’s not going to ask them to do anything that he’s not working just as hard to do. I think our example is up there in front of us all the time. It inspires us to work real hard and to stick with it and get it done. I think the Arkansas people are very loyal. The people who have known Bill Clinton for a long time, even out of the state, they were all willing to go where they were needed to talk about Bill Clinton. He had friends, like his Georgetown friends and his high school friends, and people he’d met who came from other states and were willing to help. It wasn’t just Arkansas people that

were loyal. He has a lot of loyalty out there. I think that loyalty was very evident to people who didn't know him. I think it was a Bill Clinton campaign from the word go. It was one where you go out and touch people. You look them in the eye and they know you're sincere when you talk to them. I think that made a big difference.

DB: Is it not still incredible to you that it was possible to do that on a national scale?

MAS: It is. It's amazing to me. I thought Bill Clinton was doing all he could to get it done in Arkansas, and he went out and did it. I think, too, Al Gore was a good plus. He was a good person to do this, too. It's the same type of sincerity. It's genuine and I think people recognize that when they get out and shake hands with him or look him in the eye and they know they both care. That extended Bill Clinton somewhat—Hillary and Tipper, of course. It's just been mind-boggling to me that we've done it in Arkansas so many times, and I guess it's been hard for me to realize that Bill Clinton is really president. To me it's like we did another campaign and we won. By the way, I've never lost a campaign yet, for anyone I've worked for. I did not expect to lose this one. There was never one time that I thought that we would not win.

DB: That was one of the questions that I was going to ask you. But first, you've been part of these state organizations. How would you describe the campaign organization? Was it centralized, decentralized, or what?

MAS: It was different from any campaign organization I've ever worked. I think it was decentralized, somewhat. I think, rather than having a person in charge, we had areas. We had people in charge there. It was kind of like graduating from high

school to college. In a campaign where you have *a* person in charge, you still are not fully responsible for what you do. I think this is like going on to college. If you study, you do well; if you don't, you don't make the grade. You don't have mother there all the time asking, "Have you studied tonight?" I think it just called on a lot of professionalism from those who were in the organization. It's not to say that we did not work together, but I think each area had their job to do, and they did it. Then when we put it all together, it worked.

DB: I think you've already answered this, but when were you certain that Clinton would get the presidential nomination?

MAS: The day he announced.

DB: Is that also when you assumed he would beat Bush for the presidency?

MAS: Yes. It really is. I just never imagined that Bill Clinton would start the journey without being victorious in the end. Bill Clinton has an innate ability to know what is going to happen politically. I knew when he decided it was time to run, that he felt he could win. I felt that if he felt he could win, then he could.

DB: What, from your perspective, was the low point of the campaign?

MAS: It was after the New Hampshire primary when they kept hammering away about Bill Clinton's character. I just knew how hard he worked and what kind of person he was and how much he cared about the issues. It really hurt me for him because he was beat up so badly. It's not that I didn't think he could come back. It's just that I hated for him to go through that because he was working so hard. I knew how he was inside.

DB: What, from your perspective, was the high point of the campaign?

MAS: Personally for me, and I'll probably cry when I talk about it—it was the night he got the nomination. I started crying and I couldn't ever quit. I got a big hug from Bill Clinton when he walked in. It was an extra big hug and my kids called from Florida about 3:00 in the morning and said, "Mom, you were on national TV and you were crying." My oldest daughter was pregnant at the time, and if she stayed on schedule we were going to get Bill Clinton elected and then she was going to have our first grandchild. At the convention, the next night when he was making his speech, I decided that I was going to dedicate the rest of the campaign to my grandbaby and the future of my grandbaby. He came a month early. Two weeks before the campaign, and I was going to get everything organized. In the middle of getting ready for our bus tour in Arkansas, I had to hop off to Jacksonville, Florida, and watch my grandson be born. Everything worked out fine.

DB: So the last part of the campaign was for?

MAS: Jeffrey Lake Boone.

DB: What is it that you really want the future to understand about this campaign?

MAS: Probably what I wanted from Bill Clinton. That is to accept people the way they are and be inclusive rather than being exclusive. For lots of reasons, but, I guess, primarily, because I'm a female and I have two daughters. I don't want to be the same, but I want to be equal. I don't think that females have been treated equally as far as this profession. I just hope for the future of my children and my grandson that he would recognize the work that women can do—be a better husband and father. What I've learned from Bill Clinton is that we don't have a person to waste. That the world is not all black and white. There's a lot of grey.

You have to accept people the way they are and work with them and accept them.  
People are not necessarily going to be the way you want them to be. They're the  
way they are, and we all have to live together.

[End of Interview]

[Reviewed and edited by Pryor Center staff]