

William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Interview with

Clay and Kathy Farrar  
Hot Springs, Arkansas  
24 June 2005

Interviewer: Andrew Dowdle

Andrew Dowdle: It is June 24, 2005. My name is Andrew Dowdle, and I'm in Hot Springs, Arkansas, with Kathy and Clay Farrar. Good afternoon, and thanks for having me here.

Clay Farrar: Thank you.

AD: So the first thing like I'd to ask—where were you born, Kathy?

Kathy Farrar: I was born in Little Rock, Arkansas.

AD: Clay?

CF: I was born in Hot Springs in 1950.

AD: Okay. Could you do me a favor and both tell me the date and—you've already told me the year, but the date and the year.

KF: I was born on December 29, 1947.

CF: And November 27, 1950.

AD: Okay. Kathy, when did you move to Hot Springs?

KF: I moved to Hot Springs when I was in the ninth grade. My parents decided they liked Hot Springs and living on the lake, so we moved over here. I went to Lakeside High School and graduated there.

AD: Your parents are . . . ?

KF: Jane and Richard Kelley.

AD: Clay, [approximately] when did your family come to Hot Springs?

CF: My grandparents came in 1927, and then Mother, who was a native, met my father in 1945 after World War II because he had been injured in the war and was sent to the Army and Navy Hospital there.

AD: And your father was Clay Farrar, Sr.?

CF: He was Clay Farrar, Sr., and passed away in 1985.

AD: And your mother's name?

CF: Dana Farrar, and she's still alive.

AD: What was your impression of the schools here? I guess we'll start with Kathy, since you went to schools in Little Rock before you came here.

KF: The schools here were very much smaller than when I went to Pulaski Heights Junior High [School] in Little Rock. The school I graduated from, Lakeside, had sixty-five members in my graduating class in 1965. It was a big adjustment—riding a school bus, which I had never done. Everything was a big adjustment, but I adjusted well to it.

AD: Clay?

CF: I was [in] the class of 1968 at Hot Springs High [School]. Hot Springs High, at the time, was the big school in the county, and Bill Clinton had been four years ahead of me, but our [senior] class was approximately 400 students.

AD: Tell me a little bit about [what] Hot Springs as a community was like.

CF: Hot Springs went through two evolutions. The first evolution, which was from the turn of the century to 1965, was [when] we had illegal gambling. That pretty much shaped and colored the town. And [in] 1964, 1965, 1966, our illegal

gambling was shut down by both federal action and state action, and the city started changing from an outlaw gambling community to more of a resort and retirement community.

AD: Do [you] think that it's fair to say that Hot Springs was considered somewhat unique in terms of Arkansas communities, as compared to the rest of the state?

CF: Yes. Hot Springs has always marched to the beat of its own drummer, and, for Arkansas, is fairly cosmopolitan. We've had a lot of influx of out-of-state people, so we're not parochial—or as parochial as the rest of Arkansas is. And it's also had such a colorful and exotic background because of the thermal bathing, because of the corruption, [and] because of the gambling lifestyles—[a] very, very different town than most places in Arkansas.

AD: Do you think that you were aware of that when you were [in] high school?

CF: I'll let Kathy answer that.

KF: I was certainly aware of the gambling, but I wasn't aware of the corruption. I had several very good friends in high school who were directly involved with the casinos here. We were just in awe of their lifestyles [laughs] and all the stories. My parents certainly went to The Vapors for the entertainment and the gambling. It was a big social outing, so I had no idea about the corruption side.

AD: But it did seem kind of unique and cosmopolitan. This is from somebody who lived in Arkansas—lived in Little Rock—so, again, it would seem that there would be an obvious difference between living in a small town and [living in] Hot Springs, but there's also a difference between coming from Little Rock down to this area.

KF: Well, there was and there wasn't. Of course, Little Rock had lots of attractions, but gambling was such an exotic venture here. My parents—particularly, my father—he loves to gamble. That's one of his favorite pastimes, so I grew up with Oaklawn Race Track and The Vapors. The gambling was just a way of life. I didn't think a whole lot about it other than, "Gee, this is fun."

AD: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the first time you met Bill Clinton?

KF: The first time I met Bill we were in high school—probably the tenth or eleventh grade. My parents and his mother, Virginia [Kelley], had mutual friends. I'm sure I met Bill probably on Scully Street, where he lived. His mother loved to entertain, and we went there quite frequently. That's when I first met Bill.

AD: What were your first impressions of President Clinton and his family?

KF: Well, you went to Scully Street, and that was one of your favorite places to go because his mother was so warm and welcoming, as was Bill. Bill always struck me as a very friendly kid, but he was always busy. He always had something he was going to do—a project or a book to read. And, of course, he was very involved in his music. That's what I remember, initially, about Bill.

AD: Did you ever hear him play?

KF: Yes. He would practice at home, and sometimes we'd all groan and say, "Oh, no." [Laughter] He was very serious [laughs], so we would listen to his practice sessions and he would talk—of course, he talked about politics. He had a great passion for what was going on in this state and in our local government at that time.

AD: Mr. Farrar, you didn't meet him until later. Is that correct?

- CF: Correct.
- AD: You had mentioned 1978 or so?
- CF: Yes. The first time I ever really saw him in person was in 1978.
- AD: But you also mentioned that you had heard about him before that.
- CF: I was aware when I came home from college between 1968 and 1972 that there would be this underlying drum roll that some Clinton kid was coming back to town. I had known some of his extended family, and I always wondered who it was because when he would come to town, he would make the rounds to Ray Smith, who was speaker of the house in the state legislature. Bill would basically go around and see five or ten of the politicians in town, and we would hear that Bill was in town—even though I didn't have the faintest idea who Bill was. There was an awareness that some guy who went to these fine schools would come back and was making the rounds in Hot Springs.
- AD: Which, again, is very interesting. As you pointed out, at that time he hadn't even graduated from Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] yet and came back to teach at the University [of Arkansas, Fayetteville].
- CF: Yes. Exactly. See, he would have gotten out of Georgetown [University, Washington, D. C.] in 1968, and then he went to do his Rhodes scholarship in 1968 and 1969. So this would be 1968-1969-1970. And he was at Yale, I think, [from] 1970 to 1972. [During] those periods [when] he would come, there would be some awareness in the town that this interesting fellow who seemed to really like to keep in contact with the people of Hot Springs was back.
- AD: You mentioned that your families were mutual friends, Kathy—not only during

the high school years, but, obviously, afterwards.

KF: That's correct. We kept up with Bill off and on through the years. When I graduated from the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville] in 1969, I left the state for several years, so I really didn't have a lot of contact then. Occasionally, during the holidays I would see Bill. He might have been in from Fayetteville, or wherever. I'd briefly see him at his mother's or another couple's house.

AD: Could you talk a little bit about what his mother was like as a person?

KF: Virginia was unique, there's no doubt about it. Virginia always, I thought, had a very soft spot in her heart for children—kids—young people. As I said, when I first met her back in the 1960s, I was crazy about Virginia. As the years went on, we maintained a relationship. She was, of course, very active in the community as far as politics. She was very supportive of her children and very involved in whatever they did. I kind of grew up with Virginia, in a way, and knew her from high school until the day she died.

CF: And I knew a little bit about her business background because her office was in my old office building. What Virginia had managed to accomplish, to her credit, was as a nurse anesthiologist. Before the mid-1970s, you really did not have many practicing physician anesthiologists. So, as a result, she was the number-one—for all practical purposes—anesthiologist in Hot Springs, in the sense that she had quite a number of people who worked underneath her. She, at one point, actually had a physician who almost worked for her. She had an enormous business as an anesthiologist in Hot Springs until about the mid-1970s when the medicine changed and they wanted to have more involvement of a physician

anesthesiologist.

AD: Yes.

CF: [It felt like?] there were more physicians available who would do this, and also the malpractice thing changed and you couldn't just be a nurse anesthesiologist on your own. You had to work under the supervision of a physician.

AD: I've heard that she was a very successful businesswoman, but that there was some jealousy there professionally.

CF: Yes. That part I know third-hand—that there was a little tension in the community in the 1970s. I think in the 1960s it was just accepted that nurses did anesthesiology, but by the mid-1970s the mindset had changed—the paradigm had changed about a nurse anesthesiologist doing it without supervision, so things started changing there.

AD: Obviously, again, she was somebody who was very successful professionally. The fact that she was your stepmother for a number of years—does that give you any insight in terms of how she was able to be that successful? If you jump back twenty years before that, that would seem to be something that you wouldn't have predicted, in most cases. You had this woman whose husband had recently died. She had a small child. To go from that to [having] a very successful practice is not something that most people would predict would be a likely occurrence, but it *did* happen.

KF: I just think she was probably at the right place at the right time, and she made connections with the medical community. She probably outworked everyone else. She was just there. Whenever someone needed her, she would go. I think

she worked up her practice, and she worked into it where [ ] success [ ]  
Virginia would be the person that you called. She dominated the field here.

AD: I've heard a number of people talk about surgery that they had when they were children, and [they] talked about their memories of her always being very positive ones, in terms of somebody who seemed to go beyond what you would normally see.

KF: Oh, I agree.

CF: She also had a very sharp mind and high IQ, and was one of those [people] who never forgot a name or a face. I think it's because she had such a sharp mind and such a good mind that, number one, she was able to succeed in a fairly technical area of medicine and, number two, that's where Bill and Roger [Clinton] got their memories.

AD: Yes.

CF: Bill Clinton's memory is awesome, and he inherited it from his mother.

AD: There obviously seems to be a lot of easy parallels in terms of memory. Some people talked about the personality as well. You're kind of nodding your head, Kathy. Do you see the parallels?

KF: Oh, absolutely—not only Bill, but Roger, also. They inherited Virginia's personality. She'd walk into [a] room and you would immediately be spellbound by her because she'd just win you over with her friendliness, and Bill and Roger are the same way. Before you knew it [laughs], you would be just right into whatever they were talking about, and they made you feel like you were the most important person in the room while they were there. They made you feel totally

at ease, and I think that's a gift.

AD: When did it dawn on you that [Bill Clinton] was going to be somebody who was going to be an important public figure—maybe not that you had predicted that [he would be] president, but somebody who was going to end up making a big impact in terms of public service?

KF: Oh, very early on. I can remember—I guess it was 1965 or 1966—Bill and I actually went out on a date and went to the movies. At that point he was working, I believe, in Washington [D. C.] for [Arkansas Senator J. William] Fulbright, so he was quite focused on Fulbright and the books that Fulbright had written. He gave me an entire lecture all evening on politics according to William Fulbright. It was at that time that I knew that he had the passion and certainly the intellect and the drive—that he was going to go *somewhere* and be in public service.

AD: Was the commentary on Fulbright positive?

KF: Oh, absolutely! We talked about the domino theory in Vietnam, so I felt quite enlightened and tried to tell all *my* friends. [Laughs]

AD: Well, certainly, for 1965 and 1966—yes, that was, again, certainly a little bit ahead of the curve in terms of that.

KF: Oh, he was always ahead of the curve and always thinking of what was next, so we benefited from that—the ones of us who are his friends. "What are you thinking about this [trip in?], Bill?" And that stands to this day, actually.

AD: One of the things that we've been asking everybody in Hope and Hot Springs is about the race relations in their community at that time. Could you talk a little bit about race relations in Hot Springs in the 1960s?

CF: I'm a student of Hot Springs history, so I have a *little* bit of background on that. Hot Springs had better race relations than a lot of the South because we had far more employment for the Negroes in Hot Springs and, specifically, your tourist industry, your bathing industry. You really had a—for your African—what's the proper word now?

AD: African American.

CF: African American. Your African Americans had far more opportunity here than most of the South, and also [there] were much more upscale jobs. Your ratio of African Americans to whites was about sixteen percent, as I recall. There was never a sense of the racism and hostility here that you had in the deep South. I do recall in the 1950s the separate entrances at the theaters, and I do recall the separate water fountains, but it was never as "over the top" as the rest of the South. They didn't integrate the high school until 1969 because the old high school where Clinton went was too small.

AD: Yes.

CF: There was no way—it was already busting at the seams. So when they built the new high school in 1969, they integrated it, and I think it was fairly uneventful.

AD: Before I go on, that reminds me of one thing I've also been asking people. Looking at Hot Springs—well, let me get back to that point a little bit later on. [Kathy,] you had moved from Little Rock to Hot Springs. As a teenager, did you notice any difference?

KF: I had lived in Little Rock through the [1957] Central High School [integration] crisis, so I was very much aware of what it could be like, as my brother graduated

a year before the Central crisis. When we moved here, I didn't really notice a lot of difference because I had been raised in an environment where the color of your skin was not what was important. My dad was very responsible for giving me a very open look at race. I just never thought a lot about it until much later. But, as Clay said, I can remember the separate drinking fountains, and in Little Rock, on the bus, African Americans had to ride in the back. I never could figure out why. It just didn't seem right. But going to a very small school like Lakeside here in Hot Springs, it just wasn't a problem because it really didn't exist in my high school environment.

AD: Yes. So looking at how Hot Springs possibly influenced President Clinton in areas such as race relations—if you look at him as president—somebody where there's obviously a large amount of affinity—a two-way affinity between him and many people in the African-American community—is there anything from Hot Springs or any personal forces that you saw in terms of his family or other things that might have contributed to that?

KF: I think Bill was raised in a household where his mother taught her children to look at the *person*, not the color of their skin. I'm not sure that Bill ever knew that he should be prejudiced against someone unless he was told to do so, and I do not believe that he was ever told that in his home growing up. I never saw it. Never.

AD: One thing that you mentioned, Clay—we kind of jumped back to that—again, Hot Springs High School closed in, what was it, 1969?

CF: The old Hot Springs High School was shut down, and they merged the black high school and the Hot Springs High School into what we now call Hot Springs High

School.

AD: Yes. Looking at it, that old high school was probably about four or five blocks from downtown.

CF: Yes.

AD: It was fairly close. Just kind of looking at the old Hot Springs—you had talked about the change in terms of tourism from gambling-oriented tourism to more family-oriented tourism. If somebody goes to Hot Springs today, are they going to really get a good glimpse at what Hot Springs was actually like in the early 1960s?

CF: You can get a sense of it at the Fordyce Bath House Visitors Center—to get a sense of the bathing. [It's] really hard for people to fully appreciate the scope and scale of the gambling here in the 1950s and 1960s because when they shut it down, they shut it *down*, and it was illegal, so they didn't exactly make museums out of it, okay?

AD: Right.

CF: But the gambling here—we were one of two places in the entire United States of America where you had casino gambling. You had Las Vegas [Nevada] and us, and it was a *big deal* here. We had every major entertainer you could think of except Frank Sinatra come through, just as Vegas did.

AD: Yes.

CF: Because the gambling subsidized big-league entertainment.

AD: So, again, there was obviously this very symbiotic relationship. I've talked to other people, and they've said that they kind of knew [it] was there when they

were teenagers, but that there really wasn't—at least in their lives—a lot of day-to-day interaction.

CF: Oh, I'd say I disagree. You had kids in high school whose parents were owners of the casinos or worked at the casinos. And you had kids in high school who worked part-time jobs, either at the hotels or kind of indirectly at the casinos. So we all knew it was going on, and we all knew that the kids whose parents were the gamblers had these brand-new cars all the time and were living lifestyles way beyond our lifestyles in the 1960s. There was an awareness that there was so[me] *really big money* at those casinos, and that the gamblers' kids always [laughs] seemed to have these exotic and expensive lifestyles.

AD: You're nodding your head, Kathy.

KF: Well, one of my very best friends' father was directly involved in one of the casinos. I concur. I thought her house was a palace. [Laughter] She had a French phone in her bedroom and a purple satin bedspread. I had never seen anything like that. She had a red convertible [automobile]. We knew it was alive and well in Hot Springs—the gambling.

AD: So even with Oaklawn today, it's just still not the same thing because it's not the casinos that are there and the scope of it has minimized to some degree.

CF: Oaklawn, which has been a constant presence since 1935 when they began racing—adds two months a year an influx of tourists, and so on. But the casino gambling was twelve months a year, and they were building fairly major hotels to accommodate the gamblers. The Majestic built some nice suites. The Aristocrat Hotel was built. The Royal Vista Inn was built. We had some big hotels being

built *specifically* for the gambling.

AD: Again, there is that vast change. What are some of the other changes? One of the things that's kind of interesting is, obviously, just even looking at an older map here—a picture of Central Avenue. Would that be probably from the . . . ?

CF: 1890s.

AD: 1890s. Okay. Yes, because I guess Central [Avenue] was all kind of filled in at that point. It's not—is that Hot Springs Creek or . . . ?

CF: Yes.

AD: And it had run down the middle of that. The city has grown a lot just in terms of the expansion. I don't think I ever knew [until a couple of weeks ago] that St. Joseph's Hospital—I hadn't even really thought about the fact that its present location wasn't where it had always been. Has the fact that the community has grown so much—has that had an effect?

CF: Well, Hot Springs is deceiving in the sense that if you look at the city population, it's only about 34,000, but the county population is 100,000. The county population has grown dramatically. The city limits have not expanded because there's always opposition to expanding beyond the city limits, so your actual city itself will look stagnant on your population statistics, but that's a misrepresentation of what's going on in this county. You have one family a day, 365 days a year, retiring to Hot Springs Village. You have at least one family a day retiring to Hot Springs. Your population, I think, has gone from 85,000 to about 104,000 in the county in the last twenty years—17,000 net growth. It's a major destination for retirees. It's very prosperous. Hot Springs is a very

prosperous town right now in 2005.

AD: Obviously, a lot of changes have happened over the last forty years.

CF: When gambling collapsed, it was very dicey that from 1966 to 1976 the town was going to be successful because we lost our number-one attraction. In 1974 or 1975, Cooper Communities opened Hot Springs Village and, slowly but surely, Cooper Communities then developed Hot Springs Village, which now has 16,000 full-time residents. So that has more than made up any lost revenues from gambling because the 16,000 . . .

AD: Isn't that one of the two largest gated communities in the United States?

CF: Yes. It's very large, and it's projected to grow to 20,000 or 30,000 people in the next fifteen to twenty years. But the larger issue is the 16,000 upper-middle-class people, the average income of which is probably double what it is in Arkansas. A very prosperous group of folks.

AD: So, again, it's always that you've had one group of people who've had disposable income, in a sense, that have come in and replaced another group.

CF: Yes. And the retirees are here 365 days a year.

AD: Yes.

CF: And spending on average \$100 a day, 365 days a year, whereas the vacationer comes her six days a year and spends \$100 a day.

AD: Yes.

CF: So it's a *dramatic* influx of money.

AD: I guess we probably ought to go back to President Clinton. [Laughter] So you left and went to the University of Arkansas, Kathy, and then you moved. Where

did you move? Did you move to Florida?

KF: Yes, I moved to Florida and taught school there, then I hired on with an airline and lived in San Francisco. I was out of Arkansas for several years. When I came back in 1975, Bill was just beginning to start running [political] races. I can remember the early campaigns—Virginia and all her friends [laughs] diligently writing postcards [and] making phone calls. I mean, they had a major campaign office here going twenty-four hours a day working for Bill.

AD: Do you remember any stories about that? Can you talk a little bit about some of the things that happened? Did you ever have the opportunity to get involved in his early races?

KF: Certainly. I helped write cards and make phone calls, and my dad would go all over the county and put up signs and hand out flyers and work at the polls. We really had a grassroots movement here in Hot Springs and Garland County for him at the get-go.

AD: At this point, I guess, it's fairly safe to say that Garland County is trending Republican. What was the political atmosphere like at that time in the 1970s?

CF: Hot Springs had a big union presence and had a fairly large Democratic presence until the 1980s, when the whole state and the whole country started to trend Republican. So you had a fairly active and aggressive Democratic constituency here. Specifically, you had very active unionists here who got behind Bill Clinton. His initial core support here was manufacturing union workers who were very, *very* much in his camp.

AD: It was a very big base of support then, as opposed to if somebody like him came

back now . . .

CF: Yes. The problem now in Hot Springs for Bill is that the town is [made up of] retirees, and because so many of the retirees have come from the Midwest and upper Midwest, we are more and more trending Republican in this town.

AD: Yes.

CF: And the Republicans come here without a whole lot of love for Bill Clinton as a Democratic person, you know, because they're just *Republican* through and through.

AD: Yes. Kathy, can you tell me a little bit about the reaction that people in Hot Springs had when he was coming back and when he was running in those first few races? Clay had referred to it in the fact that this was not somebody who had just gone off to college and graduate school for eight years and then just kind of popped back in and was starting to run for office.

KF: Well, everyone knew Bill. I think Bill probably knew everyone in the county by their first name. He had some connection with almost any family [laughs] that was here. And I think people took a great deal of pride that he would come back and want to work for the state of Arkansas and make it a better place. Virginia— if you'd go into the campaign headquarters, it was not "*if my son wins,*" but "*when.*"

AD: [Laughs]

KF: "Here, you go take these cards and hand them out down in that neighborhood, and we're going to celebrate when we win." I just think he had such a ground flow of support from *all* the people who have known him from his childhood on. Bill

would come and meet and greet, and catch up with everybody. He'd sit down at McClard's [Barbecue] and talk and visit—all over the place. He had a great deal of support to start with.

AD: You mentioned, Clay, that you had met him in 1978. Was that when he was running for lieutenant governor? No, that was actually when he was running for governor.

CF: I met him when he was standing in line to go see "Star Wars" on a Saturday night in Little Rock in February of 1978. He was in a line of about 300 people, and he just stood out like a flashlight. He was just somebody that you just recognized. I had known his wife, and I just went up and shook his hand. But it was interesting.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

AD: So it was something in terms of that charisma that he had very much stood out.

CF: Yes.

AD: How did you meet—you said that you knew Senator [Hillary Rodham] Clinton before?

CF: We'd had a legal case in which I had a stake, and where she represented the University of Arkansas as a beneficiary, and she and I worked on a case together in 1976-1977.

AD: Okay. You mentioned that you had a few high school stories.

CF: Well, since I was four years behind, over the years I've met quite a number of people who went to high school with him. There are three stories. These are second-hand, but they are very credible sources that have always just astonished

me. My favorite one was that he was a member of DeMolay, which is the Masons' young people's group.

AD: Yes.

CF: And apparently the DeMolay fellows in the high school had mothers' night, and Bill had memorized, I believe, the poem is "Ode to an Irish Mother," and would every year recite from memory this twenty-minute poem, and every mother in the room would be crying at the end of it. In the words of a friend of mine, who was a mother, [it] was basically, "Oh, am I going to have to cry again? Here, Bill is going to give this poem."

AD: [Laughs]

CF: It was so foreign to me because our high school group was so wild compared to his group. I just can't fathom that you sat around and had a dinner for your mother and read her love poetry [laughter], okay?

AD: But this might be kind of an interesting point that there's kind of a generational change there.

CF: Oh, there's a *major* generational . . .

AD: In four years . . .

CF: Between 1964 and 1968, there was an *enormous* generational change. Everybody I talked to who went to high school [with Bill Clinton] said he was a total straight arrow—no alcohol at all—basically was almost shy around the co-eds or the young ladies. And a lot of the kids at Hot Springs High School thought he was a member of the faculty because he would wear a coat and tie to school.

AD: [Laughs]

CF: He walked around like he was running the place. I bumped into a couple of high school kids, who said, "All the time that he was at high school, I thought he was like an assistant principal" [laughter] because he was so much in charge of the place. But I always love those high school stories. That's my three stories.

AD: Okay. Looking at this in terms of the build-up to when he was running for governor—what was your reaction, Kathy, when you heard he was running for governor? Was that something that you just kind of naturally assumed that he was going to do?

KF: I think because I was so closely associated with the family—with my dad and Virginia and watching all of this—it wasn't surprising to me at all that he would do this.

AD: I guess, probably while we're at it, since we're right about at that time period, could we talk a little bit in general terms about the relationship between your father and President Clinton's mother? Again, obviously, they married in—why is the year escaping me at this point?

CF: 1981 or 1982.

KF: 1981. Yes.

AD: 1981 or 1982. Okay. So, obviously, a fairly close relationship that was developing at that point, in terms of your two families.

KF: Well, they had so many mutual interests—Oaklawn and gambling [laughter]. Both of them loved parties. Both of them were very people-oriented. They loved life. And both of them certainly had the common interests of Bill and his political career.

AD: So your father also ended up having a respect for Bill Clinton and wanted him to do well.

KF: Oh, absolutely. My dad adores Bill Clinton. My dad worked many, many long hours in every campaign Bill Clinton ever had, as I mentioned before, from nailing up campaign posters around the county, [to] taking food on election day to the campaign workers. Anything he could do to help Bill Clinton, my dad has done for years.

AD: Okay. Going up to that first governor's campaign, what was your reaction when he won?

KF: Well, I was quite pleased, naturally, because I thought it would be a good thing for the state. I thought maybe Arkansas would finally turn around [laughs] as far as education, and hopefully move up a bit. I really had high hopes when Bill came in to office.

AD: What was your reaction when he ended up losing? Were you surprised when he lost in 1980?

KF: Oh, actually, I think when I got down to it and when you were sitting around the coffee table in the final days, you knew that he probably was in trouble because he'd made a couple of bad mistakes with the [vehicle registration fees]. I hated to see him lose because I really was afraid Arkansas would begin to go backwards again. I was quite relieved when he just dusted himself off and said, "I'll run again."

AD: Were you surprised by that, or was that just something you expected?

KF: Oh, no. Virginia raised her boys to just get up and dust yourself off and go on.

Don't look back. Go forward, and meet your goals.

AD: Looking back to 1978 and 1980—that first term—what were people at Hot Springs saying about Bill Clinton at that point? Obviously, they were probably very excited when he first became governor.

CF: I think the city was proud to have him as governor, but also with each passing year, he had another year he hadn't lived here.

AD: Yes.

CF: He really hadn't been a resident of Hot Springs since he left in 1965 to go to college, so less and less there was a sense of "He's our hometown boy," because he was really from Fayetteville, and then Little Rock. So some of the city's emotions—and some of them were not linked to him. Some of them just didn't know him. It would have been a long, long time since he'd really—it wasn't like he ran for governor as a resident of Hot Springs, okay?

AD: That's true.

CF: He ran for governor as a resident of Fayetteville, so you didn't have this overwhelming—it's not like Plains, Georgia, where Jimmy Carter . . .

AD: Were you surprised when he lost in 1980—looking back twenty years?

CF: Yes, because you would sit there and say, "Frank White beat him. Why would Frank White beat Bill Clinton—other than you had a little bit of a voter reaction that Bill was a little too progressive for Arkansas?"

AD: Yes. Could you talk a little bit about when you began to know him, in terms of a close relationship like you have over the last few years?

CF: Kathy's dad married his mother [Virginia] in 1982, so we started being invited to

the governor's mansion for the Christmas party. We saw them infrequently from 1982 until 1992. But then his mother developed a strong affection for our daughter, and [laughs] because of our daughter, we got more and more in the inner circle—because she was very fond of our daughter. So throughout the 1990s, we actually saw more of them in the presidency than we did in the governor's office.

AD: What's it like to have somebody who—again, he's not a blood relative, obviously—but [he is] a relative. What's it like to have somebody who's a relative of yours [who is] president of the United States? Let's start with Kathy. That's not an experience that most people have. [Laughs]

KF: No. And when you're kind of minding your own business [laughs] and all of a sudden, you think, "What?" It has really been a wonderful experience for us because both President and Senator Clinton have been nothing but wonderful to us and our children. We've had some amazing experiences, of course, at the White House and visiting with them in Hot Springs. It has been amazing. And for me, I look back—I don't know about Clay, but it's like it was a dream and it really did not happen. It's like, "Did I *really* get to go there and do that?"

AD: Clay. Again, it's not like he's a blood relative, but what is it like to have somebody who's part of your family [be] president of the United States? That's not something that happens to most people.

CF: The analogy I use would be as if a spaceship landed in my backyard and [aliens] said, "We're friendly. Do you want to go for a ride?" And you sit there and say, "Out of the 5.8 billion people on earth, you chose *me*?" [Laughter] "And I get to

go for a ride in a spaceship and come back unharmed? Oh, how cool!"

[Laughter] Actually, the presidency was fun for us because we got all the good and none of the bad. I got to play golf with him twice as president, which was probably the coolest thing that ever happened to me.

AD: I'm probably going to want to talk a little bit more about that—not the golf in detail, but I want to step back for a second. Were either of you surprised that he ran for president, or was this what you expected?

KF: I think by the time he ran for president—I think we all knew that that was his goal, so I think it was just a matter of timing when he was going to run. I really think that. I wasn't strictly surprised—when.

CF: Arkansas has such an inferiority complex. We really can't believe one of our own can be president because we're just really sure that there must be something wrong with us since we're from Arkansas.

AD: [Laughs]

CF: I was a little bit skeptical, simply because I had what I call the "Arkansas syndrome." "Oh, we're not good enough. We couldn't *possibly* have a presidential candidate who would succeed."

AD: [Laughs] When did it dawn on you that he was going to actually be the president of the United States? Was it at the beginning, or was it something over time that just kind of ended up dawning on you?

KF: Oh, I don't think it sank in for years. [Laughter] It was like, "I can't believe I'm sitting here and you're the president of the United States, and we're in the White House. This is just not *real*." I think the first time when you realize [it is] when

you call him Mr. President, not Bill.

AD: Clay, you talked about [how] it was something [like] the Arkansas inferiority complex. When did it dawn on you that President Clinton *was* going to end up winning?

CF: I remember having dinner with Dick Kelley and Virginia in the early fall of 1992 before the election. It was beginning to sink in that Bill was actually going to win the election. He had gone through the Democratic convention and you were sensing his momentum, and suddenly with Virginia and Dick—we started talking very seriously about how momentous this was. I remember the dinner, and I remember the sense of the focus of all of us was shifting and the enormity of what he had accomplished. Because, before that, you kept saying, "Oh, well, there will be some dark horse who will come into the convention and win, or there will be something [that will] go wrong in the campaign."

AD: Yes.

CF: Suddenly, it was September, and you [said], "My gosh, he's *winning!* My gosh, he's on the fast track."

AD: [Laughs]

CF: We actually held an event here in September 1992, which Kathy and I were involved in organizing, where we got him to come home off the campaign trail and we had the folks at Hot Springs show up. We had a combination campaign rally, but "Hot Springs welcomes home its native son," which was a nice event.

AD: That sounds great. You mentioned playing golf. What's it like going to the White House and playing golf with the president?

CF: The first time he and I played at Belvedere Country Club a month after his mother passed away—you follow the trappings of the presidency with all the secret service all around. About 200 people showed up to watch [us] tee off, which, of course, [made] me, as a very bad golfer, even *more* nervous than I already was.

AD: [Laughs]

CF: And all I remember was saying a little prayer before I swung the club, saying, "Oh, God, let me not miss this ball or hit somebody with it." Other than that, it was a great deal of fun there. I got to play with him two years later in Washington. We were driving to the golf course in his presidential limousine, and I had accidentally left my car keys to the car at the Little Rock Airport at a friend's house in Washington. So I said, "Mr. President, can I borrow one of your phones in the car?" This was Sunday afternoon. I dialed the number and it didn't go through. So he picked up the phone, dialed it for me, and my friend was sitting at home. The White House operator said, "Would you hold for the president of the United States?" And my friend was incredulous, but he was on the phone speaking with Bill Clinton. And Bill laughed and told my friend, "Well, I place all Clay's calls for him," and handed me the phone. [Laughter] That was heady, heady stuff, riding in the presidential limousine to play golf.

AD: I'm trying to think of what I've asked you and what I've not. You obviously knew Virginia Kelley later in life. What was your impression of her?

CF: Virginia had an indomitable spirit. Virginia was tough as a boot. I think the most vivid memory is how, with full-blown breast cancer, which had metastasized and was going to be fatal, she did not let it get her down. The last year of her life she

had awesome amounts of transfusions and medical attention going on, and you never knew it. Because she knew medicine, she knew how to cope with receiving transfusion after transfusion. Up until a week before she died, she traveled as if there was nothing wrong. She died on January 6, 1994. Six days before, she was in Las Vegas seeing the Barbra Streisand concert—with full-blown metastatic cancer. So you've got to admire her indomitable spirit. She kept on charging until the end.

AD: Kathy, I see you kind of nodding your head. Is there anything that you wanted to add?

KF: Well, Clay summed her up well. I think that's one thing—whatever you might think of Virginia one way or another, she really *did* have that spirit, and that's really inspiring to anyone. I think that's the best thing you can say about Virginia.

AD: One of the things that I've been asking everybody is that, obviously—people who are in President Clinton's family—that are in his circle of friends—talk about all the very positive things about him, but there are people who have a great deal of animosity towards him. At the time, and, I guess, even today—what do you attribute that to? It's interesting—you can talk to his friends and his family and you'll hear all these stories and all these examples of things that he's done that are very humane and very decent. But you have—and, again, obviously, living in Hot Springs you know this very much in terms of some of the people that you mentioned—you have people who have a very negative reaction to him.

CF: I summarize it in two ways. I always think, first, a prophet from his own country is not honored. The truth is, he may be a little too forward-thinking and

progressive for some people in Hot Springs and Arkansas. And I hate to say this, but sometimes you think people in Arkansas want you to do well, but not *too* well, okay? Maybe a little sense of insecurity of his incredible capability.

AD: Yes.

CF: He *so* out-distances his pack. There's some resentment over that.

AD: There's some jealousy there.

CF: Yes.

AD: Kathy?

KF: Well, I agree with Clay. I think you have people who are just so intimidated by him—and, let's face it, some people don't like someone who does *so* well. I think they're just jealous and don't know how to handle someone like that, so they get a very negative image of him in order to deal with their own problems. [Laughs]

AD: Thinking over the last couple of years, have you noticed any changes in President Clinton's personality since he left office? Is there anything that you notice to be different?

KF: I would like to say that he has slowed down, but he hasn't.

AD: [Laughs]

KF: I think, if it's possible, that he's even *more* concerned about the human conditions in this world. I think now that he is not pulled in so many different directions, he's focusing in on what he's interested in. I think he's looking even more inward into what he can do for the world, not just this country.

AD: I'm trying to think—we've gone over a lot of ground, but is there anything that we've not covered? I'm glad you brought notes, Clay. Is there anything that

we've not really talked about that . . . ?

CF: We had the opportunity to visit with President Clinton in February 2005 for two hours at her dad's house. He was flying across country and stopped by to check on her dad because her dad had been having some health problems. So on a cold February day, we sat at Dick Kelley's house from 3:00 [p.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.]. He was already late to get on a plane to make a speech in Los Angeles [California], and I will never forget this—three little eight-year-old boys were standing outside the gate of her dad's house, and President Clinton drove off. He was already late. He stopped the car, got out, shook their hands, talked to the little boys for three or four minutes—basically, you know, "Nice to meet you. Do you live around here?" I watched that, and I said, "He's not running for office. He's not doing it for any ulterior motives other than he just *likes* people."

AD: It would be easy enough just to wave as you're passing by.

CF: Or roll down the window and say, "Hello." He stopped the car and got out. You just shake your head and say, "I have never seen anybody who is so willing to give of [himself] in situations that ninety-nine percent of all mortals would say, 'Yeah, there's some kids. Hi, kids, I gotta go.'"

AD: Yes.

CF: I always thought that that was very reflective of that true heart he's got for humanity and for children. He had a thousand reasons not to stop, and he stopped.

AD: That's a very interesting story because you hear—again, the common label that his opponents called him, "Slick Willy." You look at that, and that just seems like

such a disconnect between those two—between that label and what reality seems to be.

CF: Exactly. Exactly.

KF: I agree.

AD: Is there anything else that you wanted to add, Kathy, that we didn't talk about?

KF: We've pretty much covered it.

AD: Well, I'd like to thank you for your time. I really appreciate both of you setting aside an hour or so of your time on a warm but beautiful day in Hot Springs.

[Laughter] Thank you.

CF: Thank you.

[End of Interview]

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