The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History

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William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Connie Nowell

Interviewed by Betsey Wright

February 23, 2012

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Objective

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The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved in the Pryor Center archives. The transcripts, audio and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at https://pryorcenter.uark.edu. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips in addition to the transcripts to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. We attempt to transcribe verbatim all words that are spoken, including false starts and repetitions.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 18th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - and standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Betsey Wright interviewed Connie Nowell on February 23, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: This interview is being conducted by the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History in partnership with the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies. Let's see. The interviewee—how do you—you wanna use Constance or Connie?

Connie Nowell: Connie.

KK: Okay. The interview [*laughs*]—well, you know. Make sure. I'm sorry, I've already—what . . .

Betsey Wright: Nowell.

KK: . . . I haven't—remind me of your last name? Nowell.

CN: No, it's actually Nowell.

BW: Nowell.

KK: Nowell. Okay.

CN: Just like Powell except with an *N*.

KK: The interviewee is Connie Nowell.

BW: Dr. Connie Nowell.

KK: Dr. Connie Nowell. *N-O-W-E-L-L*. And the interviewer is Betsey Wright. The interview will be transcribed and returned to the

interviewee and interviewer for their review before being published. The interview, transcripts, and related materials will be deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville and at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock. Connie, if you agree with this statement, please give your verbal consent now.

CN: Yes, I do.

KK: Thank you.

BW: Thank you, Connie.

KK: Wait, let me get back here. [*Creaking*]

Trey Marley: Okay, Betsey.

[00:01:10] BW: Mmkay. Let's start with your beginning. Where were you born and raised?

CN: I was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and I was raised in the little town of Mountainburg. I think they finally got up to 600 people in the town, but it's a very small town. I was the oldest of four children. And my father owned a handle factory.

BW: What's a handle factory?

CN: He made wooden handles. Hammer handles, hoe handles, all the—shovel handles, all those different kinds of things. They—in fact, that had been a family business for I don't know how many years, but my grandfather ran it, and then when they moved to

Mountainburg from Missouri, they—he started it there. And it—it's interesting. It was hard work but was something that he enjoyed doing, and my mom didn't work outside the home. She did take care of the books. But I was very fortunate. Education was a priority with both of them, even though my b—my dad didn't have a high-school education. He got drafted. They moved from Missouri to Arkansas, and before he got back in school, between his junior and senior year, he got drafted. And he could've gotten out of it, but it was World War II, and people were very patriotic back then, and he said, "No, I'm going." So—but he was on the school board. You know, they were always extremely involved in the school there.

[00:03:04] BW: Now did you go to school in Mountainburg?

CN: I went to school in Mountainburg for all twelve years, and then when I graduated, I did one year at what used to be Fort Smith Junior College. It's now, you know, the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith. But I did one year there and then transferred to Fayetteville, and all of the rest of my degrees are from Fayetteville.

[00:03:31] BW: Talk about your other degrees. What did you major in in undergraduate and . . .

CN: It was very funny. My father thought I should be a teacher. You

know, that's what women were supposed to do back then. And I really—that was not something that I wanted to do, but to make him happy, I said, "Okay, I'll be sure that I get in a situation where I can get a teaching certificate." And then spent the rest of my life in education. But it was one of those that I majored—I started out in social welfare, switched to sociology and psychology, and when I went over to see about doing my teacher-ed program, I was informed that those were not teaching fields. So I was not able to do the teacher-ed program, which was very interesting because sociology wasn't a teaching field, either, and yet I had talked to them when I first started to school at the university. So I finished my degree, got all the hours I needed in social studies to be certified because that was most of what I had. You know, a lot of those hours would apply. [00:05:01] Then I started working on my master's in counselor education, so I had the psychology for undergraduate, then I did psychology and counselor ed for a master's. Still didn't have a teacher's certificate. When I started working on my doctorate, I went into counselor education. And I was within—I guess I had one actual class left. I had a research class left when I got a job at the Department of Education as a guidance specialist. And so when I started down there, and even before I started down

there, I had done—I had taught a little bit at Mountainburg before I went back and worked on my doctorate. It was very funny. I told somebody that when I was working on my undergraduate, the best thing that ever happened to me was I was offered a job teaching when I was a junior. [00:06:10] So the only good thing was that the program—the school started two weeks before school at the University of Arkansas. It took two weeks to—for me to decide I wasn't ready to be a teacher. They had me teaching math, and that was back when students had the new math. And they couldn't—you know, you start out, and you—first thing in the book's division, right. Seventh grade math. Well, these kids couldn't divide. Turns out the reason they couldn't divide was that they couldn't multiply. So it was two weeks of fighting with that, and I said, "Hm-mm. Nope. You're gonna have to find somebody else. I'm going back to school." So that was the best thing, I think, that ever happened to me, having that little bit of experience and deciding that, you know, I really don't think I'm cut out to be a teacher.

[00:07:04] BW: In the classroom.

CN: In the classroom. Although I, you know, I did—I worked as a counselor there in Mountainburg after I—while I was finishin' up my master's.

[00:07:16] BW: Now what year did . . .

TM: Stop for just one second. We got a siren outside. [*Siren*] I'm gonna pause tape.

[Recording stopped]

[00:07:21] BW: When was it that you went to work for the Arkansas Department of Education?

CN: I [*sirens*] wanna say [19]65.

BW: And you moved to Little Rock.

CN: And I moved to Little Rock and . . .

KK: Sorry, sorry.

TM: Sorry.

KK: It came back.

TM: I'm sorry, we're . . .

KK: It came back.

TM: We gotta bust this again. [*CN laughs*]

[Recording stopped]

[00:07:40] BW: Okay, so you went to work for the Arkansas Department of Education in Little Rock in . . .

CN: Nineteen sixty-five. And was a guidance specialist. I had the schools in the northern part of the state. And what I would do is I would go out, make school visits, work with the counselors, try to assist them in getting back into what their role should be.

We—at the time, with special ed and everything else that was going on, counselors were doing an awful lot of paperwork. They were doing a lot of the principal's job, the scheduling. They weren't doing a lot of counseling. And so we tried, you know. We wrote letters back. We did what we could. But it really—it was frustrating at a—you know, for a while. But it was very interesting, too. [00:08:41] And one of the most interesting things was when I did my doctorate, what I did was I focused on the role of the secondary school counselor. And p—one part of it was a job satisfaction. And I fully expected to see the counselors in the schools be very dissatisfied because they were doing all these other things instead of counseling. I didn't see that. They were all very satisfied with their jobs, and as we started talking about it and looking at it trying to figure out why, you know, why you don't get the results you expect to get when you do something like that. If they could help one student, if they felt like they succeeded with, you know, one or two students, and they went on to college, or they did—you know, they had a better life because of something that that counselor had done—they were perfectly satisfied with their job, even though they were doing all these other things that they didn't have to do or that they really technically weren't supposed to do.

So. . .

[00:09:52] BW: Well, when did you first become aware of Bill Clinton?

CN: When he was attorney general. Is . . .

BW: And when did you first meet him?

CN: Probably about that same time.

BW: Do you member when you first met him?

CN: Do you know—I'm trying to think. It was at—no, I really don't. It was s—it was a meeting that I had gone to, and I had worked with Sam Bratton on some of the special ed stuff, and I had started working on the assessment stuff, you know, ju—we'd been talking about it even before he became governor, you know, that—education was always a priority, and I think that was one of the neat things that I saw.

BW: Now were you working with them when he was preparing to become governor after he'd been elected governor and was still attorney general, or was he working on those things as attorney general?

CN: He—it was after he'd been elected governor when they were actually starting to try to put their . . .

BW: Programs together.

CN: . . . their programs together, yeah.

[00:11:10] BW: And Sam Bratton then subsequently became his education aide in his first term.

CN: Right.

BW: [Nineteen] seventy-nine and [19]80. So.

CN: Right.

[00:11:17] BW: So what did you think about this—as an educator, what did you think about this new, young governor?

CN: I was very impressed. I felt like finally we were going to see some changes in education. I think that's one of the things that I saw early on, that education was going to be a priority, it was gonna be a commitment, it was not just a word of mouth kind of thing, that he really lived it, you know, that that was what was—he believed that education was what was necessary to move this state along.

BW: And then he got defeated.

CN: Yeah.

BW: And [*laughs*] . . .

CN: He had to leave. We took a step [*laughs*] back, so.

BW: What did—were you surprised that he was defeated?

CN: [*Sighs*] No.

BW: What did people who worked in the Department of Education think, generally, about that?

CN: That he upset some people, you know, that—he was trying to do some things, and I think from where we ca—were looking that, you know, there were people that should've been supportive that weren't real sure that this was the direction they wanted to go. And you know, I mean, we know from everything that happened later, you know, some people had to be drug. [*BW laughs*] But you know, they went kicking and screaming. They were not real happy about the direction. And it was people—not just legislators. It was people in the Department of Education. It was school superintendents and people out in the communities that were happy with the status quo. They didn't really wanna see a change.

[00:13:22] BW: Do you remember any of the education initiatives that he made when—in that first term?

CN: Not many because I honestly think there was so—I just don't think there was much that he could do and get support for in that first term. So I don't really remember very many.

[00:13:46] BW: So then he got elected again in the election of [19]82, and what did it feel like being in the Department of Education as that change was made?

CN: That's when I think we started seeing that some things were going to happen, that education was be go—was starting to be

more important. I think we saw that there were gonna be changes, you know. There were gonna be big changes in the Department of Ed. You know, we looked at—when you look at what happened with the vo-tech schools and everything that was going on there—you know, there were times that I think probably people were concerned about what was happening, but you know, when you look back now, it was the best thing . . .

BW: Yeah.

CN: . . . that could've happened to us.

[00:14:47] BW: Well, part of what was both tough and helpful to him in doing a lot of education programs was the supreme court ruling that . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . the state funding formula was unconstitutional. And then he decided we can't ask for more money without asking for better schools at the same time.

CN: Right.

BW: So were—did you then—were you at all involved when the standards commission was put together?

CN: Yes. Yes.

BW: Talk about that.

CN: When—I was involved with some of the objective writing, you

know, actually quite a lot of it, and with the whole situation with the testing legislation that we were implementing to make sure that the standards or—and I guess—we were doing two different things. I mean, there were accreditation standards which actually looked at what the schools needed to do, and then there were standards that looked at what kind of job was being done in the school, you know. Not just providing courses, certified teachers, teachers that were capable of teaching, but were we in fact—had we in fact defined what needed to be taught and then made sure that students were in fact learning that? And that's what that whole—to me, that's what that whole program was about. I can remember when I was trying to sell the testing program to the various schools in the state, and it was a big sale job.

[00:16:47] BW: Now, was this the teacher testing or the student testing?

CN: Student testing. Student testing.

BW: Explain what that was.

CN: We started out with—the very first testing legislation was twofold. We did a standardized test, and we started out with the SRA test of basic skills.

[00:17:08] BW: What's SRA?

CN: Science Research Associates. It's j—it was just a publishing company. We started out with that for our norm reference test. And then we developed a criterion reference test, and that test was a mastery test to see whether or not students had basic skills.

BW: And at what grades were these tests being given?

CN: Three, six, eight for the MPT and . . .

BW: MPT is . . .

CN: Minimum Performance Test.

BW: Kay.

CN: And I have to think back 'cause it was a long time ago. I'm thinking we did four, seven, and ten for the norm reference test.

[00:18:02] BW: What is the difference between minimum performance and norm reference?

CN: It's interesting. That was one of the things that you had to work with schools on because they didn't really understand the difference. And with a minimum performance test, you really set a level that students need to achieve. You know, you need to say that, you know, at least 70 percent of your students should be passing this 'cause it's a test of basic skills. And a norm reference test wa—is a test that's normed on a national population. And what they do is they give the test to students

all across the country in their norm group, and then they compare your students back to that norm group. [00:18:57] One of the things that I tried to do as I explained that to schools was I told them it was like broad jumping. I said our minimum performance tests—let's say we want 90 percent of our kids to be able to broad jump four feet, you know. And so the way we test that is we line 'em up, and we have 'em jump. And we do that with all our schools, and when we get through, we find out that 95 percent of our kids can broad jump. So we're all pattin' ourselves on the back and saying what a good job we're doing in education in Arkansas 'cause we've got all of—we've got 95 percent of our kids doing this. [00:19:41] So we say, "Okay, since we're doing so good, let's see what everybody else in the rest of the nation's doing." So we look at that norm reference test. And we find out that the majority of their kids are broad jumping six feet. So that's why you needed both testing programs to make sure that when you implemented objectives, standards, you know, you changed your instruction to be sure that you were covering the objectives that you had decided were important for students to know, and then you tested those objectives—that your objectives and your curriculum matched up with what people in the rest of the country thought was

important so that our kids could then compete with anybody, not just against Arkansas kids.

[00:20:38] BW: How much of this kind of testing had been going on before the [19]83 special session on education?

CN: There had been quite a bit of norm reference testing because—and that's one reason that we went with the SRA because that was the test that was used by most school districts. School districts had to test for Chapter 1.

BW: Chapter 1 was what?

CN: The program for students that were working below grade level. They could get extra funding to do reading—some other programs for that and . . .

BW: To bring kids up to the level where . . .

CN: Bring kids up to the level . . .

BW: . . . they were supposed to be.

CN: . . . where they were supposed to be. And especially if a school was a—like a target school. If they had more than, I guess, 65, 70 percent of their kids on free lunch, then everybody in their school could take advantage of the . . .

BW: Chapter 1.

CN: . . . the Chapter 1 programs. So.

[00:21:42] BW: Okay, so I interrupted you when you were talking

about how much of this had been going on before the education reform session in [19]83.

CN: Other than the norm reference testing by the school districts, none.

BW: So you were then in charge—you were very involved in implementing . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . the minimum performance testing . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . that was instituted then.

CN: I was directing that program.

[00:22:07] BW: How quickly did it go into effect?

CN: We had the test—after the legislation was passed, we had a test selected, and I think we gave the norm reference test the first year. By the second year, we had the minimum performance test in place. So it was . . .

BW: Pretty quick.

CN: It was very quick. But we already had the objectives, even though some school districts complained that, you know—oh, just like we hear now. They're teaching to the test. The teachers had already developed curriculum. They'd already developed objectives. And so what we had to do was go back

and develop test items to meet those objectives, to test and see whether the students were actually meeting those objectives. And then after the—after it had been in place for a few years, then we also had to convince people that this is a minimum performance test. It's the minimum students are supposed to know, not the maximum. You know, you take them as far as they can possibly go. Don't quit, but realize that if they don't have these basic skills—you know, if they can't add, then they're not gonna be able to subtract. You know, if they can't do multiplication, they're not gonna be able to divide. So you know, you had to convince people that what we're doing is making sure that the students have the minimum skills they need to move to that next level.

[00:23:53] BW: And this was happening at the same time that the school districts were being required to add a lot of kinds of courses . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . that they hadn't been teaching . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . before . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . and find millage increases to pay for it.

CN: And it was amazing the number of schools that voted heavy millages to be sure that they could keep their schools. That's—I guess that's the good and the bad of school consolidation. I have seen it totally wipe out a small town that loses their school because that was the focus of that community. But I've also seen the difference in students that are able to take the courses that they need to move on and succeed. So.

[00:24:48] BW: And the new requirements were supposed to make sure they got basic courses. It was astonishing . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . how many school districts simply didn't offer . . .

CN: Well . . .

BW: . . . foreign language or geography or even have guidance counselors.

CN: Right. Right.

BW: So—and did you still keep your hand in working with counselors?

CN: I worked with them because they were pretty much who was responsible for administering the testing program in the schools, so there was a pretty close relationship still.

[00:25:25] BW: And were there a lot of new counselors added?

CN: There were. They started adding counselors then, and I guess it was, what, two or three years later before we really got the

heavy push, and they cut the numbers—the number of students they could work with.

BW: And were those counselors able to continue doing the other tasks that they—outside of the counseling responsibilities?

CN: Not nearly as much.

BW: They really had heavier responsibilities.

CN: They did. They had more responsibilities with students. And course, that was when special ed was getting so big, and so they did get saddled with a lot of that. And unfortunately, they probably were the best people in the school to . . .

BW: To work with special ed.

CN: . . . make sure that it was—you know, to make sure that it was implemented correctly. But it did take away from some of the other things that they should've been doing.

[00:26:35] BW: Well, and at the same time, we instituted requirements for gifted and talented programs.

CN: Yes.

BW: And I'm sure the counselors were important in helping to identify that those children got their . . .

CN: They were.

BW: . . . extra help and . . .

CN: They were.

BW: . . . push . . .

CN: They were.

BW: . . . intellectual development.

CN: They were. And—which—we mentioned it earlier. And I don't remember the exact date that we started Quiz Bowl, but I do know that that was part of that gifted-and-talented effort.

BW: I—it was the 1986.

CN: Okay.

[00:27:14] BW: And as we sit here in 2012, it is a huge, major . . .

CN: It is.

BW: . . . event every year on public television in Arkansas.

CN: It is.

BW: It's fabulous. The student interest in competition—and it's—it just takes your breath away at how smart these kids are.

CN: They are, and they really enjoy it.

BW: And we started it as just a little program.

CN: Yeah.

BW: Yeah.

CN: Just a little—didn't dream how it would grow and what it would do.

BW: Took off.

CN: It did take off and . . .

[00:27:50] BW: And of course then we also expanded the Governor's School.

CN: Yes.

BW: And we had these summer programs. Were you—did you ever work with the summer programs for gifted and talented?

CN: I did not.

BW: You—and after you got to the governor's office, you had some oversight . . .

CN: I did.

BW: . . . on those things. Yeah.

CN: Yes. I knew—but it was like there were so many other things going on that . . .

[00:28:13] BW: My mind's image of the Department of Education after the [19]83 special session was that there was a beehive of people who were just—had to start moving ten speed like they had never had to move before 'cause so much had to be done. And at the same time, there was still resistance forces . . .

CN: Oh, sure.

BW: . . . from the small school districts that didn't want to have to meet these standards, from teachers who didn't wanna have to take a test, from the administrators to whom—who finally caught on that they were also gonna have to take the test. So all of

that was going on.

CN: Oh and there—yeah. And you know, I guess I understand some of the panic with the teachers. If you'd been teaching kindergarten for thirty years and you hadn't taken a test and you were uncomfortable with your math skills, you probably were scared to death. You know, we did have some people that were really scared. The department did what they could to provide workshops and go over things that . . .

BW: Preparation.

CN: . . . teachers would know. Give 'em a refresher course.

[00:29:39] BW: And of course, teachers and administrators were very involved in the development of that test . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . too.

CN: Yes.

BW: It wasn't done in a vacuum.

CN: No.

BW: And we were very concerned that minority teachers felt that they were overrepresented in the process of developing that because so many tests, standardized tests, did have a racial bias.

CN: Right.

BW: And we wanted to make sure this one did not.

CN: Right. And I think we succeeded.

BW: Now most of the people who worked for the Department of Education also had to take the test.

CN: Oh yeah, we all took it.

BW: Yeah.

CN: Yeah.

[00:30:15] BW: Yeah. Well, talk about some more of the environment of programs. And it wasn't long before you joined the governor's staff, and how did that come about?

CN: I guess I was lucky [*laughs*], so.

BW: Oh! Or we were.

CN: Well, I don't know which, but anyway, I—you know, I had worked with the student testing program for, I guess, almost ten years. And it was really pretty much fully implemented at the time. Now they've—it's changed an awful lot since then, you know. Some for the better, some for the worse, I think. But it has—you know, things change. And you move on. But I was, I guess, really getting kind of burned out where I was. Probably the longest I'd been in any one position for any time. And I've always been fairly political. I've enjoyed politics. I was one of the few people at the Department of Ed that could go over and

testify before a committee and not get wrung over the coals.

[00:31:44] BW: What kinds of things did you testify on before the legislature?

CN: Well, a lot on the testing. I had to go over and justify the budget all the time because we were running through contracts that were, you know, $250,000, $300,000, $400,000 contracts. And Lloyd George always had fun with that. [*BW laughs*] But . . .

BW: Lloyd George was a very vocal member of the . . .

CN: He was a very . . .

BW: . . . Arkansas House of Representatives.

CN: Very vocal member, yes. And it was interesting that it was one of those that, you know, you—I would go over and sit and watch people and watch them tell—start answering questions that weren't being asked and . . .

BW: [*Coughs*] Sorry about that.

CN: It's okay.

BW: I interrupted you . . .

CN: It's okay.

BW: . . . because you were talking about how you . . .

CN: Right.

BW: . . . were interested in politics anyway and you were comfortable

with the legislature, all in the context of how you got moved and recruited to come work in the governor's office.

CN: In the governor's office. It was one of those—I mean, when I helped write the legislation for the testing program and assisted on some other legislation, you know, that just sort of wet my feet, I think, 'cause I really enjoyed that. It's kinda like writing grants. It's—some people like it, some people don't. And I enjoyed writing legislation. Everything that went into it. I did go over when the department testified about the testing legislation. You know, I was involved in that. And then had to go over and justify budgets and all of that and learned a lot. [00:33:48] One of the nice things was that I always answered their questions, you know. I didn't tell them things they didn't ask. I didn't tell them more than I thought they needed to know, maybe. But I did always answer whatever question they had. And because of that, it gave me . . .

TM: I'm sorry to interrupt.

CN: That's okay.

TM: Can you take the paper and, if you're not using it, go ahead and put it down?

CN: Sure.

TM: 'Cause I'm hearing it quite a bit.

CN: Oh, I'm sorry.

TM: I apologize for interrupting.

CN: Not a problem.

BW: Well, you can pick it up any time you want to and then set it back down.

CN: Not a problem. I guess because of that, I had a pretty good reputation. You know, they really felt like I was honest with them. And I was. And I think there were people at the Department of Ed that they didn't feel that way about because I've watched—I watched how they dealt with some people. So you know, that was part of it. [00:34:56] Was good friends with Sam Bratton, my . . .

BW: Who had—by then had become the governor's legal counsel and budget officer.

CN: Yes. And my daughter had worked for Carol in the summer taking care of her kids.

BW: For Carol . . .

CN: Rasco. So I knew Carol. And when the job in the governor's office came open, they both told me they thought I should apply for it. So.

[00:35:31] BW: Happily so. [*Laughs*] We were very pleased. Well, what did you start doing different when you got to the

governor's office from what you had been doing at the Department of Education?

CN: I wrote a lot of letters. [*Laugh*] That's . . .

[00:35:45] BW: What kinds of letters were you getting? I mean, they were coming to the governor, obviously, and you were responsible for seeing to it that they got substantive responses but . . .

CN: What—well, questions about the standards, questions about the testing program. Just all—I mean, the letters that come to the governor's office are amazing sometimes. I mean, it's anything and everything that somebody has a concern about. You know, if it was education oriented, then it usually ended up—you know, you routed it to my desk [*laughs*] usually so—and then it got back to the governor depending on—you know, I mean, I—he read and signed, so it was—you know, they always went back.

BW: Enormous amount of correspondence . . .

CN: Oh, it . . .

BW: . . . requests.

CN: Yes.

BW: Things that people would never, in most states, think of talking to the governor about . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . they wrote this one about.

CN: Yes.

BW: And some of 'em were happy letters.

CN: They . . .

BW: And some of 'em were concerns . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . and complaints about what was going on in their schools.

[00:36:53] CN: But some of them were telling about all the good things and how pleased they were with the direction that we were going, and you know, those were the ones that you really liked to get and read. And then the oth—when you could—when there was a problem that you could take care of, you know, that was a good thing, too. But you know, there was—I mean, that was part of it. Going to all the committee meetings, you know, it's . . .

BW: Legislative committees.

CN: All the legislative, all the education committee meetings. You know, staying on top of all of that. Reading all the new legislation that was being drafted, working with the Department of Ed to be sure that when there were initiatives that they were actually being implemented, that they—and that they were being drawn up the way that the governor's office felt like they should

be. And sometimes that was a real challenge because you could think you were communicating clearly, and you know, you'd end up with something that was totally off the wall.

[00:38:08] BW: In so many respects, we put you in a very awkward position because you had been . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . inside the Department of Education, and suddenly we wanted you monitoring how the department was implementing the governor's initiatives and the legislation that had been passed and working very closely with the Board of Education to help to get them to monitor more closely because he was very picky about who got appointed to that board.

CN: Yes.

[00:38:40] BW: And talk a little bit about how that changed your collegial relationships in the department.

CN: I can still remember the first time that I had to call the director of the Department of Ed and say, "You will do such and such." And it was very uncomfortable because he did not see me in that role. And you know, I had to just say, "Tommy, I'm sorry, you know, I'm not over there anymore. This is coming from the governor's office, and you need to pay attention to it."

BW: It was tough for Tommy. Now, we're talking about Tommy

Venters . . .

CN: Tommy Venters, yes.

BW: . . . who was the director of the department. Not for too much longer after that, I don't think. When did he leave?

CN: He was there about a year.

[00:39:39] BW: And he had been at the department for a long time . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . and was buddies with all of the school administrators who couldn't believe what had happened to change their lives.

CN: He was buddies with all the school administrators, and he was buddies with a lot of the legislature.

BW: The legislators, too?

CN: Mh-hmm.

BW: It was your classic, old boy network that was . . .

CN: It was . . .

BW: . . . at work.

CN: It definitely was, yes.

BW: And we were pushing, pushing . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . pushing.

CN: Yes.

BW: It was hard.

CN: And you know, it was hard. You had to push because he was getting it from both sides. I mean, he was getting it from us saying, "This is what you gotta do. This is the direction you've gotta go." And he was hearing from everybody in the field—and I was, too, because I had, over the years with the testing program and everything, built up a pretty doggone good relationship with a large number of school superintendents. And so I was catching it from that side, too. But you know, it was like you just—you know, I'm sorry. You know, this is the direction we have to go in order to see a difference. And . . .

[00:40:52] BW: And there were a lot of them who were excited about it.

CN: Yes, there were.

BW: And being there at the time that . . .

CN: There were.

BW: . . . this kind of change was taking place.

CN: There were. And that was the one plus that I think I had was that during the school testing program, I never told them anything that wasn't true. If I told them, "You're not gonna get compared as school districts," they didn't get compared. So if I told them something, then they believed me. And I think that

helped. I think that was one of the strengths that I brought.

BW: Absolutely. You had credibility . . .

CN: Yeah.

BW: . . . coming and going.

CN: And I think that that was a real plus, that credibility. I was very glad that I had it, and was able to use it effectively to help implement some of those things.

[00:41:51] BW: Okay, talk about some of the programs that you then helped get put into place.

CN: Oh gosh. [*Laughs*] I kinda went through and looked at some of those education initiatives that—and I mean, you know, obviously the testing program and the student and teacher testing was already implemented. But the standards—we were just—we were in the big middle of trying to get those in place. State board had bought on. It was, you know, trying to be sure that the department stood strong and that if schools didn't do what they were supposed to do that they did put them in school improvement plans, or that they, you know, they went in and required them to do those things. And at the beginning, that was very hard. I mean, you know, now if the state takes over a school, it's like no big deal. You know, they do it, they appoint somebody, hopefully they get them out of fiscal distress or, you

know, what other—whatever other kind of distress they might be in, and everybody's pretty positive about it. But in the beginning, before that had ever happened before, you know, it was like, "Oh. Oh. What's—you know, we're gonna lose our school. We're gonna"—you know, all this stuff. So you know, that was—it was tough.

[00:43:32] BW: The cooperatives were going into place then.

CN: They were.

BW: Talk about what they were and what kind of touch you had with making sure those got put into place.

CN: When they first started, they were probably more in-service. I think people weren't really sure what was going to come out of them. They were looking at it as another layer. But then as they started moving staff out there and being more efficient with how the department was relating to the school districts, I think—now, I don't think you could ever do away with the cooperatives. I think they're a very integral part of the school system in Arkansas.

BW: And they did a lot. They helped do bulk purchasing to save money . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . for the districts. They helped furnish curriculum and new

teachers when it was a borderline case of being able to offer a course.

CN: Right.

BW: They were . . .

CN: They—and you know, now they have the teacher centers where the teachers can go in, and they've got materials that they can make bulletin boards or laminate or do, you know, all sorts of things. And that's a—you see lots of teachers from those areas come in and use that facility because they may not have that at their school.

[00:45:06] BW: Well, we had required all school districts to provide kindergartens . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . in the [19]83 session.

CN: Yes.

BW: And you were on the governor's staff when a huge push was made for earlier childhood education.

CN: Yes. Yes. And we got lots of, oh, homeschool parents being very upset about it. And even though you tried to explain to them that we're offering it. We're not making it mandatory. You don't have to send your child. But if somebody is a working mom and wants their child in early childhood—you know, you're

keeping us from having that available to them. And it was—you—they were so sure that if we got it in place that it—that we were gonna then say everybody had to do it. You know, that it was very difficult. I can remember meeting with their lobbying group, and they were pretty doggone strong.

BW: Well, of course, the homeschool concern was much broader than early childhood education.

CN: Oh, yes, it was—yes, it was. But that was just—that was my first experience with them was when they came out en masse with that early childhood, and it was just—I was having real trouble understanding that because we weren't requiring it. And it just didn't—it was like, you know, why would you prevent somebody from having access to this when it can only help?

[00:47:10] BW: We began by providing incentives, I think, to the school districts to offer early childhood education.

CN: Yes.

BW: And it gradually moved to school districts were required . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . to offer early childhood education.

CN: Yes.

BW: Which was adding yet another aspect to what schools were doing in those communities.

CN: Well.

[00:47:33] BW: What else was going on?

CN: We were doing the—let me flip through some of my stuff that I've—I had looked at. The governor's task force on volunteers in education.

BW: What was that?

CN: That was a program that was in—established in the Department of Ed to try to encourage volunteers in the schools to give some assistance, to get the community involved with what was going on. I think a lot of what we did was trying to get the community—not just have the school be a separate entity with their instruction and the only community involvement was, like, in sports, but to try to get the community infused in everything that was going on in the schools. And that's what I saw that program as being. [00:48:40] We worked with the Cities and Schools project. And that was a—it was an interesting program. They wanted to do, you know, health and human services in the schools for disadvantaged students, you know, low-income students in rural settings. I don't think when they first started they realized that almost every rural school in—or almost every school in Arkansas was rural. [*BW laughs*] You know, I think that was kind of—I think it was kind of overwhelming when they

actually got here and started looking at that. You know, of course, we had all of the mess with Little Rock and the migrant school starting and the—there massive . . .

[00:49:40] BW: What was the—explain what you mean by the migrant school starting. The—Little Rock you're talking about the desegregation . . .

CN: Yes. Yeah, the desegregation.

BW: . . . litigation that was unending.

CN: Little Rock developed some schools that were primarily—well, like they changed Parkview to arts and music.

BW: Magnet.

CN: Magnet. One of the junior highs was—oh it was gi—was it Gibbs? I'm trying to think—that was social studies. 'Cause I can remember we did an Earth Day with everything that went on with that, and it was a big deal.

BW: So these magnet schools were focusing in—they offered everything else, but they focused on . . .

CN: They focused on certain things, and maybe foreign language, maybe math and science, you know, some of those things. [00:50:39] But at the same time Little Rock was doing the lottery, you know, for those spots in those magnet schools partly for—and they were redistricting or re—changing their

boundaries, and you could have student in the same family in the same—that should have been in the same junior high that they wanted to put in two junior highs. So we had a lot of phone calls, we had a lot of letters, we had a lot of people that were very upset with what was happening. If you've got somebody that works and their kids are going to two different schools, they have a hard enough time going to things with one school, and then you're sending 'em to two different places. So you know, there was a lot of confusion. There wa—as they were trying to implement new things, just the logistics and everything of the changes.

BW: Yeah.

CN: I think that was a—an area of concern. [00:51:56] The—you know, I think the standards just permeated the whole thing because implementing those, being sure that their class sizes were smaller, that they had enough teachers—and you know, we saw a lot of the schools that we'd get somebody from the community that'd write a letter and say, you know, "Oh, they've got a good relationship with the Department of Ed, so they don't—their class size is too big." Or, "They don't have enough teachers," or you know, or "Their kindergarten program's not gonna start on time because they don't have enough teachers."

And so you know, there was an awful lot of that but . . .

BW: Just a lot of hand wringing because it was so new.

CN: And there were so many . . .

BW: And so much change.

CN: . . . so many things happening at once. If we'd been able to focus on maybe one thing—but you couldn't do that because everything needed to be fixed, you know. Everything needed to be changed. And . . .

[00:53:04] BW: Well, and it was a strong commitment to the people of the state that if they paid more taxes . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . to the state and in millages that they would get better schools . . .

CN: That they . . .

BW: . . . and it had to be done.

CN: Yes. And not just that they would get better schools. That their children would have a better education.

BW: Exactly.

CN: And . . .

BW: And they would get things that . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . would pay off down the road.

CN: Yes. And . . .

[00:53:28] BW: During all this time that you were working on these programs, did you interact with the governor frequently?

CN: Oh, my gracious, yes. [*Laughter*] Yes. You know, it was like—of course, I can remember all those early-morning staff meetings. You know, I can remember phone calls at one o'clock in the morning. You know, "I got a question and"—or you know, "Hey, Connie, the governor's office is calling." [*Laughs*] "I got a question." You know, "Hang on." So and you know, a lot of that. And it was amazing to realize how focused he was and how focused Hillary was on improving education in the state of Arkansas. You knew that they were sitting there talking about it and that a question would come up, or that he was reading something late at night, and he didn't understand it, or you know, whatever. So yeah, there was a—an awful lot of time—I think Carol and Sam and I probably spent a lot of time holed up and talking about education issues and—you know, and then we're running things back and forth and so yeah, there was . . .

[00:54:55] BW: Did you get to go to events with him when you made speeches?

CN: Yes. Yeah, I—get to go? Yeah, there was a—that was—any time he went somewhere for an education event, I went. And that

was always interesting. One, being sure we got there on time. [*BW laughs*] Two, being sure that when we got to wherever we were going that we didn't lose him before we got to the meeting because he was so people friendly. I mean, we'd pull up, and he'd be out of the car and gone before I could even get the door open and out, and then I'd have to go try to find him, you know, while they were parking the car. [*Laughs*] And it's like, okay, there could be a security issue here. [*Laughs*] And it's like, you know, you constantly worried about that. Thank goodness Arkansas was Arkansas, and it was okay but—because, you know, he was gonna find somebody to talk to, find somebody's hand to shake, somebody was gonna find him and ask a question. And you know, that—he was so accessible. I don't know . . .

BW: And so energized.

[00:56:23] CN: Oh, mercy, yes. I don't know where he got all his energy.

BW: But it kept us going and kept us focused 'cause every time I'd get tired and then I'd be around him talking about what we were doing for these kids in Arkansas, it was . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . get up and go.

CN: Yeah.

[00:56:37] BW: Well, you would come back from those events laden down with notes and instructions and questions . . .

CN: Yep.

BW: . . . things that had to be answered—they—constituents just poured . . .

CN: Oh, yes.

BW: . . . these things on him.

CN: Yes.

BW: And he would say, "Connie" . . .

CN: Yeah.

BW: . . . "get this lady's" . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . "address down for me."

CN: Yes. A lot—lots of addresses, lots of notes, you know, and then come back and . . .

BW: Follow through.

CN: . . . research, follow through, get back to them, do whatever we had to do. Plus whatever came out of the event with the questions or anything like that. You know, you had to do that. You had to do briefing notes prior to as to what to expect, and then a follow-up afterwards as to how it went, you know, what

do we need to do next, where do we go from here. So you know, it was—I don't think I've ever written as much or, probably, thought as deeply about things as I did during that time be—just because there was, one, so much going on, but two, as you say, all of that energy.

BW: Well, he never stopped running out of new things for us to do, too.

CN: Oh, no.

BW: Yeah.

CN: No. No. I mean, you couldn't slow down. [00:57:55] One of the initiatives that we were involved in that I thought was really critical was—Southern Region Ed Board had a task force on minority—the number of minority teachers, increasing the number of minority teachers. And he saw that as a very worthwhile project. And we spent a lot of time working with that task force, and I think he took some things to the Governors Association from that task force and from the kinds of things that we found out. And I know—I mean, it's still an issue, but I know that we did everything we could to focus on it, make people aware, and to see that we increased the number of minority teachers. You know, and I think you can see an increase based on that.

[00:59:00] BW: Do you remember any of the specific tasks that you did?

TM: Betsey, 'scuse me. I'm sorry. We should change tapes.

BW: Okay.

[Recording stopped]

[00:59:07] BW: M'kay. Well, we were talking about the minority teacher development program.

CN: Right.

BW: Or task force. And I wanted to know if you could remember some of the specific programs or outreaches or efforts that got put into place.

CN: I know that we worked with the black ministers alliance to try to identify and do some recruiting, and that was one of the things that we also worked with the districts to try to impress upon them that you have to go out and solicit. You don't just expect people to come to you. If you want to hire a minority, you have to go look for them. You know, you may have to call somebody and say, "You know, I've got a job that's gonna be open. Do you know anybody that might be interested in applying?" And I think we communicated that. But I think that we tried to establish that network where we could let people know that this was a priority, that we did want minorities. You know, and we

worked with the deans of the colleges of education. We had a task force in—and all of the deans of the col—various teacher ed programs. The colleges of education would come, and we would discuss those kinds of things. And how do you get more minorities into teacher-ed programs?

[01:00:52] BW: I was gonna say, weren't we doing something and trying to get the schools . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . to talk children into . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . aspiring to be teachers, too?

CN: Yes. Yes. And you know, one of the things that I've noticed over the years is that a lot of students that are first-generation college students go into teaching. A—and so a—in Arkansas, we're very fortunate in that we do have a large number of those first-generation college students. And so we have a pretty good pool of dedicated people, excellent people, that wanna go into teaching.

BW: And pay is better now than it used to be.

CN: Pay is . . .

BW: It's not what it oughta be, but it's better.

CN: It's a lot better. They still have an awful lot to do. My

daughter's a teacher, so . . .

[01:01:54] BW: Where does she teach?

CN: She teaches at Cabot. Fifth grade. Middle school. She's—she just finished her administration degree, and I think she's ready to move on to a assistant administrate—you know, principal or something like that. But she likes teaching. She does a—she's a good teacher. She's a—she amazes me. I was not the kind of teacher she is. I didn't enjoy it like she does. You know, she's—she just—she can teach.

BW: Well, she didn't get thrown into teaching something where the kids weren't ready to be taught that, either, so . . .

[01:02:30] CN: That's true. That's true. That's true. And she has had the—that's the one thing that I think that I can see that's the end result of everything that we worked on. There is so much more training available for teachers now than there was. We, I think, were instrumental in getting it started and pushing the fact that you have to provide in-service. You know, teachers now have to take large numbers of in-service hours to continue to be certified.

BW: Which is a professional development . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . program.

CN: And it makes them much better teachers.

BW: I think we succeeded in getting across the idea that you never stop learning to be a better teacher.

CN: Yes.

BW: So . . .

CN: I think so.

[01:03:23] BW: And the nature of children changes over the years, too, so you have to learn new ways to reach the kids in the cultures where they are now living.

CN: And you know, if you—if there are more effective methods, then you know, you need to know what they are. You need know how to do a better job.

BW: Well, we started a lot of recognition programs, it seems like, too.

CN: The—yes. Teacher recognition started back then.

BW: And they got innovative with . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . what they were doing.

CN: And there was some—there were grants for innovative programs. So that, you know, that was going on. I think the accreditation and the credentialing—that's when it started to be beefed up. And course, now the licensure's so much more.

BW: But we were also doing development of the administrators, too.

CN: Yes. Yes.

BW: I know that a lot of the actual implementation obviously occurred at the department, but they wrote handbooks for principals with things that they had to achieve, goals they had to set.

[01:04:43] CN: Well, they also started the training for the school boards.

BW: That's right. I'd forgotten that.

CN: So—and that was a real plus because a lot of school boards had no idea what their responsibility was, you know. And you know, sometimes you had school boards that wanted to run the school instead of the superintendent, but you know, I think that some of those training modules and different things that were developed back then were very . . .

BW: Great.

CN: . . . you know, good. Some of the alternative school programs started back then, too.

[01:05:21] BW: Talk about the dropout prevention.

CN: You know, it's real interesting. In Arkansas if you look at the data, Arkansas doesn't have a dropout problem because of the way they measure dropouts. If you look at attrition, you look at the number of students that start in the ninth grade and finish

the twelfth grade, we have a big problem. We lose about 12 percent of our kids. And so I think one of the things that was influential was looking at those different numbers. Because if a school—if a child finished the year and didn't come back the next year, they didn't count 'em a dropout.

BW: Well, and in [19]83, we lengthened the age—it—by which it was—they—if you—they had to be older, now, in order to not be required to go to school.

CN: Well, they also had to stay in school to get a driver's license.

BW: Yes.

CN: So you know, you tied that—you—that particular carrot of being able to get a driver's license to being in school at age sixteen.

[01:06:46] BW: What kinds of things—you mentioned alternative schools. What kinds of programs did we do on this?

CN: Well, course, dropout prevention—part of it. But also trying to be sure that students that weren't succeeding on the minimum performance test had some extra help, you know. I think that—I know they do a lot of afterschool tutoring now, but I think that alternative school program was one—was the beginning of that.

BW: It was to provide a different school environment for them . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . because they weren't all succeeding in the same school

environment.

CN: And we see that with a lot of students. They need more time. They just can't keep up with the pace of a regular classroom.

BW: They don't learn in the same way.

CN: They . . .

BW: Not all kids learn in the same way.

CN: No. And what happens a lot of times is that students that—if the teacher is teaching only one way and the student is lost, that student becomes a behavior problem. If you can get them in an alternative program, their behavior problem goes away because they're able to learn at their own pace, and you know, if they can succeed, then that . . .

BW: They're not gonna be a dropout.

CN: They don't have to act out. And they don't have to drop out, yeah.

[01:08:18] BW: You were—talk about what—why we had the alternative schools and what they were.

CN: Okay. You know, a couple of different reasons. One, to help students that were thinking about dropping out, to give them a place that they could go and maybe succeed so that we could spend some extra time with them. But in a lot of instances, we have students that don't learn the same way. You've got a

teacher that is teaching one method and, let's say, maybe is very visual. And that student doesn't learn in that particular mode. That student may be a real problem in the classroom, a real behavioral problem. And if that student ends up in an alternative school, then if they're taught in a different method and they're allowed to succeed, then you don't see the behavior problem. And we see that a lot. I don't know whether you know what I have done since I left the governor's office, but I worked with a progra—a federal program for first-generation, low-income kids and the . . .

[01:09:37] BW: When you say first generation . . .

CN: Parents didn't graduate with a baccalaureate degree. They could have a two-year degree, but they didn't graduate with a baccalaureate degree. And low income is 150 percent of poverty on taxable income, which means a family of four could have a taxable income of forty-something thousand dollars—a net in—you know, a gross income of 40-something thousand dollars and still, when you take all the deductions and everything away, meet that income category. So you're talking about a large number of families in Arkansas, a large number of students.

BW: Certainly are.

CN: But the first program I started working with was high school

students. And what we do is we go to—we would go to the schools, recruit students, these high school students, and we tried to get counselors and teachers to identify them. We also talked—interviewed students, had them do applications, and everything. But we tried to pick students that were—that we could see some motivation, that they had potential, but they might not be living up to it an—you know, those students that get lost, that because they're poor and because their parents are not interested in school or anything, they're not getting the assistance to go to college. [01:11:10] So you—these kids—we bring them in on Saturdays. They get mileage because they're driving from different places, so usually the parents would bring them, and then they'd let the kids keep the mileage money. But they got a little stipend of $7.50, and you would think that was all kinds of money because it was important to them. But they came for tutoring on—they would come for tutoring on Saturdays, and then we have a six-week residential program in the summertime. They live in the dorm on campus for five weeks.

[01:11:46] BW: Which is fun for a kid.

CN: It's fun for a kid. They go—they have the juniors—sophomores and juniors, you know, essentially rising juniors and seniors,

which we had at the time would take high school courses that they were gonna take the next time. So they might take chemistry or biology or—and they've got labs 'cause they could use the labs at school. They take English, they take reading, they do ACT prep, all these kinds of thing. And then the students that are graduated—we paid for six hours of college classes.

BW: So you are doing an extension and expansion of the programs that you saw get started . . .

CN: Yes. Yes, yes. And I mean, you know, there are federal programs that have been around since the [19]60s, but it was really neat to move into that, you know, and see the connection. So . . .

[01:12:50] BW: Yeah. I mean, you obviously are pursuing a trend here in your career.

CN: I guess. I, you know, I just—I have—education, as I said, has always been important. I, you know, I continue to stay in it. We added—we started with the program for the high school students, and then we added a program for college-level students 'cause they have more than one program we could get funded for. And so we do similar kinds of things with college-level students. We provide tutoring, we do academic advising,

we serve as counselors and mentors and, you know, provide assistance for them moving to a four-year program. You know, we take them—we help them do financial aid, we—you know, all sorts of things. So . . .

BW: You help kids succeed instead of throwing them in a pond . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . to be—to swim by themselves.

CN: Very definitely.

BW: Yeah.

CN: Very definitely.

[01:13:44] BW: That's one of—it's fun to hear you talk about it because you obviously are passionate about it. You care about what you're doing with it.

CN: Well, it—I don't think you could do it [*laughs*] if you didn't.

BW: No, I guess not.

CN: I mean, 'cause it's—I mean, it's challenging, but it's like I was saying about the counselors. If they succeeded with a student, you know—and if you take us—if you have a student come in, and let's say they're a non-traditional student. They're scared to death to go to college. Nobody in their family's ever gone to college. They're the first one. And I can empathize with that because I was a first-generation student. But I had support

because education was important in my—to my family. But you know, some of these kids have no support. And they're scared to death. And you know, you hold their hand, you help them, you give them, you know, you give them tutoring if they need it. You kind of make sure that they're doing what they're supposed to do. You know, you check up on them periodically. You give 'em a safe place to come and study and ask questions and whatever. And then—you know, we've got students that—one of our first students is head of a program at LSU and finishing up his doctorate.

BW: Fantastic.

CN: And he was in our first group of Upward Bound students so . . .

[01:15:08] BW: And so we were talking to Ann Kamps the other day, and one of the early HIPPY babies is now principal of a school.

CN: Isn't that neat?

BW: It's terrific. [01:15:20] When—well, you—I wanna make sure that we've—go through the programs that you were talking about, initiatives that you worked on in the governor's staff, but you've reminded me so about high school day that Governor and Mrs. Clinton did every year . . .

CN: Oh, yes.

BW: . . . for the valedictorians and salutatorians.

CN: Right.

BW: Because so many of those parents were so proud that their kids had now had classes and they were gonna go to college.

CN: Yes.

BW: And nobody in their family had ever gone . . .

CN: Yes.

BW: . . . to college.

CN: Yes. Yes. And that was great. I mean, all of those kids coming to the Governor's Mansion. That was an experience that they didn't ever forget, you know. And it's . . .

BW: And we didn't, either.

CN: . . . continued.

BW: And we didn't either.

CN: Pretty much—no. Those kids were, you know—yeah.

BW: They were what we were doing it for.

CN: Yes.

[01:16:08] BW: And Bill and Hillary hung onto every word. They cared about every kid . . .

CN: Oh, they did.

BW: . . . and what they were planning to do.

CN: Yes. Yes. That's the thing I think you see so much is that they really, really cared and still care, but they cared about the

students, they cared about anybody, the people, and they cared about the people of the state.

[01:16:32] BW: Okay, when did you leave the governor's office?

CN: Good question. What was it, [19]87? Eighty—somewhere around there?

BW: I think it was after the legislative session . . .

CN: It was after . . .

BW: . . . in [19]87.

CN: It was after the legislative session.

BW: Or maybe the early [19]88 but . . .

CN: It m—yeah, I—because I went th—I know I went through the legislative session, so it may have been [19]88. I didn't go back and look at my resume for dates. That's, you know . . .

BW: That's okay. We're just doing it in general here. And what did you do immediately thereafter?

CN: I went to work for the Migrant Student Record Transfer System, and that was an interesting job. I—we transferred education and health records for migrant students all across the country. And Arkansas was the database. And then we went out and provided training—I say we. I had a team of people that worked for me that actually did most of the training. But taught them how to enter the information. And what that did was this—and it

was neat that Arkansas had it—had that particular project. But where students would have to go to the school, pick up their education and health records, take them with them when they migrated from Texas to Michigan or wherever—if they were in the system, they didn't have to do that. When they got to their new school, all they had to do was enter the student's name and we could—we would send the records from the previous school to that state.

BW: And it was a way of making sure those kids continued their schooling.

CN: Yes.

[01:18:26] BW: Did you maintain communications and connections with the governor and his wife after that?

CN: Yes, I did. I did.

BW: Give me a couple of examples of times that you interacted.

CN: Well, I guess—of course going to different things at the Mansion, but probably the big one was that the governor performed my wedding ceremony. And it was one of those that, when I called and talked to Nancy, the scheduling secretary, it was like, "Oh, there's no way he"—you know, "This is—we're in a middle of a campaign, and there's no way he'll do that."

BW: What year was this?

CN: That was 1990. And it was a campaign year.

BW: Yes, it was.

CN: It was a pretty . . .

BW: Tough campaign year.

CN: . . . tough campaign year. And she said, "Oh, I just don't see any way you can do that—he can do that." And she said, "But I'll ask." And so she called me back, and she said, "Okay. Here's the deal. If you can change the date from Friday to Saturday, we can do it between this time and this time." And I said, "Certainly. You know, that's not a problem. It's gonna be a small affair anyway, you know, family and friends, a few friends." And it was at the Little Rock Garden Club, which was kind of a neat place to have it. But the—she told me—she said, "There was no question. He just said, 'I will work it out,'" you know. [01:20:16] And I think that's the kind of relationship that everybody on the staff . . .

BW: Felt, too.

CN: . . . had. And it was funny. When he was over there, my father was talking to him and thanking him for taking the time out of his schedule to do this, and he said, "Oh, no," he said, "Connie's family." He s—and that's the way he felt about everybody that worked for him. But it was really neat. I mean, he was in

Jonesboro, apparently, that morning. You know, came back, and I don't know how he managed to slip away, but he drove his Mustang. He had no security with him. And he came over and spent a couple of hours. And you know, had a—just had a good time. He performed the ceremony. He sat around and visited and ate with everybody and, I think, had a nice, relaxing time of it.

BN: Sounds like it.

CN: You know, and then went on his way. He had to g—he was going to an Ole Miss football game in Little Rock, and it so happened we were going to the same game. I said my honeymoon was go to the Razorback game and then go to Hot Springs, you know. And then the next year for our anniversary, it fell on the same time, and it was—the Ole Miss game was in Jackson, so we went to Jackson so . . .

[01:21:47] BW: What are you and your husband involved in doing outside of your professional work?

CN: Oh, my gracious. A lot of different things. But fun things. We field trial dogs. And they are big, runnin' dogs, so they have to be followed on horseback. You couldn't keep up with 'em. I mean, we've got one little girl that will get out five, six hundred yards in front of a horse and run lights out. So . . .

BW: So how many dogs do you have, and how many horses do you have?

CN: We have four dogs. We have five horses. We probably—we go to, oh, I don't know how many field trials. We do some at Camp Robinson with the local clubs, and we're involved with the Arkansas Amateur Field Trial Association, so we work with them, and in fact we hosted a field trial a couple of weeks ago for their association. And then we do some with our weims, so they're AKC-type field trials.

[01:23:04] BW: When you say weims, you mean . . .

CN: Weimaraners. Grey dogs. Big grey dogs. Or good-size dogs, should I say.

BW: I think that's wonderful because most people don't think of an educator with a PhD and—as being involved in field trials with dogs and horses, so it's wonderful.

CN: I've always been unusual though, you know. [*Laughter*]

BW: Well, you were unusually wonderful as a staff member for the governor and with the work you did on the Department of Education.

CN: Oh, thank you.

BW: And you're wonderful to do this interview.

CN: Thank you. [01:23:39] There was one other thing about—you

asked what we were involved with. There's—and I guess I still haven't forgotten all of the initiatives and everything. We're very involved with the—it was the Black Stallion Literacy Program. The—where the kids read to horses. And we do a field trial weekend at Camp Robinson, which—the first one was last year. We raised $10,000 the first time we had one to go to the literacy program.

BW: Oh, that's fabulous.

CN: And then we're doing another one in May of this year, so . . .

BW: Oh, good for you. You're just never gonna stop.

CN: No, I'm not.

BW: Yeah, that's wonderful.

CN: I don't intend to.

BW: Thank you for . . .

CN: Thank you.

BW: . . . for doing that and for all that you've done in the past.

CN: Thank you.

BW: That's fantastic.

CN: I enjoyed it.

BW: Thank you. I enjoyed seeing you again.

CN: Been great experience.

[End of interview 01:24:34]
[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]