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

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William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Henry J. Oliver

Interviewed by Betsey Wright

December 20, 2011

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Objective

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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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Michael Haddigan interviewed Henry J. Oliver on December 20, 2011, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: Okay, this is an interview recorded by David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. The interviewer is Michael Haddigan. Did I pronounce that right, Michael?

Michael Haddigan: Yes.

KK: The interviewee is Henry Oliver, and the recording is taking place at the Bonneville House in Fort Smith, Arkansas, on December 20, 2011. Mr. Oliver, you will receive a copy of all materials, including a full transcript, to review. Once approved the interview materials will be made publicly accessible on the Pryor Center website and placed with other public archives, including the Butler Center. Is that okay with you?

Henry Oliver: All right.

KK: Okay. All right, I'll let you guys have it.

MH: Okay. Mr. Oliver, thanks for doing this oral history. First, I'd like to start out with some—just some biographical information.

Can you tell me where and when you were born?

HO: I was born September the first, 1925, in Scott County, Waldron, Arkansas.

MH: And did you—you went to school in the Waldron schools?

HO: I attended the public schools in Waldron and went into the United States Marine Corps during World War II. And when I came out, I went back to school, and I got a BCS in accounting and then went with the FBI for thirty years.

MH: And what did your parents do? What kind of work did they do?

HO: My father owned a small business in Waldron, a grocery store, combination store.

[00:01:26] MH: And did—do you have siblings, brother and sisters?

HO: Yes, I have—I had two brothers.

MH: And what did—did they go into the—similar kind of work that you did or . . .

HO: No, my one brother went into business for himself in Waldron, and he's deceased. And the other brother went with IBM, and he's now retired from IBM.

[00:01:52] MH: And when did you go into the marine corps?

HO: I went in the marine corps—let's see. [*Papers shuffle*] It'd be 1943.

MH: And where did you serve while you were in the marines?

HO: I served in the Philippines and in Okinawa.

[00:02:15] MH: And were you officer or enlit—enlisted?

HO: Enlisted.

MH: Enlisted.

HO: Sergeant.

[00:02:22] MH: Where—did you go to—I guess you went to the Philippines first and then Okinawa?

HO: Right.

MH: Can you tell us what you did while you were in the Philippines?

HO: Well, mainly we were tryin' to secure the island itself, and then we were just waiting there, then, to go into Okinawa. Course, as you know, that was a long, drawn-out battle there. And then after the war was approaching the end, it looked like we were gonna go on to Japan. But then the war—the atomic bomb was dropped, and thankfully we were spared going on there and came back home.

[00:03:04] MH: Initially—you just mentioned the island. Is that Leyte Island? Were you . . .

HO: No, I was on Samar.

MH: Samar. Okay. That's pretty far south. Did you work your way up or just ship out from there to—for the Okinawa?

HO: No, we left there and went to Okinawa. Yeah. The landing ship

picked us up there and took us to Okinawa.

[00:03:28] MH: And you were a sergeant, but you were a rifleman, infantry? I know the marines aren't infantry but . . .

HO: [*Laughs*] Well, I guess you'd say a little bit of everything. [*Laughs*] I was really a replacement until we—really throughout this thing. We went in there and had joined an outfit in the Philippines and then as a—on into Okinawa.

MH: And the Okinawa invasion was, by all accounts, you know, terribly bloody and difficult and—had you imagined that it would be as bad as it was?

HO: No, I—you know, it was a situation where the Japanese had built huge caves. And you had to seek 'em out of those caves. And then you never did know when you would bypass a cave, and they would come out and—behind you. So it was kind of a rough situation.

MH: And how long were you on Okinawa?

HO: Oh, I don't remember exactly how long. Almost from the very beginning till the end.

[00:04:41] MH: It's often said that the atomic bomb saved millions of . . .

HO: It did.

MH: . . . American lives. Had you ever had any second thoughts

about the atomic bombings? Do you . . .

HO: No, not me. I was proud [*laughs*] of us. I was thankful.

[00:04:58] MH: Right, right. Do you still remember some of the guys that you worked with in the marine corps?

HO: Yes, I—some.

MH: Keep touch at all?

HO: No. No.

MH: Yeah, it's a long time ago, I guess. [00:05:10] So you then came back to the states. Did you come directly to Arkansas?

HO: Yes, I went right to Arkansas.

MH: And you mentioned that you then got an accounting degree.

HO: Yes, I—what happened is I worked I little while as a deputy sheriff in Scott County and then went to work for the FBI. Went to night school in Washington, got an accounting degree, and then became an agent.

[00:05:39] MH: And you know, it's also well known that it was accountants who nabbed Al Capone. Is that the kind of—forensic accounting. Is that the kind of thing you did?

HO: I did a lot of accounting-type work. Mainly it would be bank embezzlement and that type of thing where my accounting applied to it. But I did directly work also. It was just when something came up that they need an accountant to do that I

would get involved in it.

[00:06:11] MH: What made you wanna join the FBI?

HO: Well, I guess mainly I thought that—you know, I liked law enforcement. And the fact that it was a job that would give me a good retirement and so forth and a future.

MH: And it also, I guess, was the top job in law enforcement.

HO: Yes.

MH: Lot different from being the deputy sheriff. What year was it that you joined the FBI?

HO: I went in the FBI in 1947.

MH: Nineteen forty-seven. And did you—and you lived in the Washington area, I suppose. Did . . .

HO: I lived there for about three years, and then I was transferred to Auburn in New York. I went out to—moved into Schenectady, New York and then down to New York City for about eight years and then back to Arkansas. The integration crisis in Arkansas gave me an opportunity to come back to Arkansas.

[00:07:11] MH: And what kind of cases did you work while you were in the FBI?

HO: Do what, sir?

MH: In that period, late [19]40s, early [19]50s, into the [19]50s, what kind of cases did you work on?

HO: All cases. All types.

MH: Any that are—that would be known to people who would view this oral history?

HO: Oh yes. I, of course, worked on this assassination case. I worked on some kidnapping cases and—yes.

MH: The assassination—do you mean the Kennedy assassination?

HO: Yes.

MH: What kind of work did you do there?

HO: I—it was my job to follow Oswald and to find out exactly where he had been and what he had been doing all that period of time. And then I was supervising a part of the other investigation, the general investigation.

MH: So you went into Oswald's past, his time in Russia, his . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . involvement . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . with the . . .

[00:08:14] HO: I tried to account for him day by day for his entire life.

MH: Did you find anything in that accounting that would lead you to understand why he might have carried this out, carried out the assassination?

HO: Not really.

MH: Really. [00:08:30] And I guess your work eventually ended up in the Warren Report.

HO: Pardon me?

MH: Did your work end up in the Warren Report on the . . .

HO: Yes.

MH: . . . assassination? Well, that must've been—you know, I—must've been very difficult to work on. It was a big shock to everybody when Kennedy was assassinated. [00:08:52] How did you feel about the assassination and about your work on the case?

HO: Well, of course, it, you know, hit everybody hard. You know, it's—it was hard for me to conceive, and it would be today, that, you know, we would actually have people to try to assassinate the president or do so.

[00:09:13] MH: Can you give me an idea of what the FBI was like when you first went in and, I guess, when you retired?

HO: Well, of course, I worked, when I first went in, with J. Edgar Hoover. Was the director of the FBI, and he ran a real strict ship. And I think it was a great organization. I don't know whether I'd say that completely today or not, but in those days it—I thought they was doing an outstanding job.

[00:09:42] MH: Did you ever have an opportunity to interact with Hoover?

HO: Yes. Yes. Several times.

MH: Just in a reporting function or . . .

HO: Well . . .

MH: What would you talk to him about?

HO: Well, first of all, when I was in Washington there, part of my duties was to take some people on tours. And a lot of 'em would wanna meet him. And I would call his office and find out if he'd be agreeable to meeting 'em, and I would take 'em to his office and introduced 'em to him in that situation. Other times I—it was routine. I'd be down for in-service, maybe, and he would call and wanna see me, and I'd go in and visit with him.

[00:10:27] MH: And did you form an impression about Hoover? Did you—what kind of guy did you think he was?

HO: Well, he was a tough guy. I mean, you know, and he ran a tight ship. And I—now, his personal life, I don't know. I didn't go into that at all. I don't know, you know, there's a lot of stories about some of that. But I think FBI lost something when they lost him as the director.

[00:10:52] MH: And do you feel—I mean, he was the FBI, initially.

HO: That's right.

MH: Do you feel that the later directors were up to that standard?

HO: No.

MH: [*Laughs*] Well, that's—and when did you retire from the FBI?

HO: Nineteen fifty-seven. I mean [*laughs*], I'm sorry. Actually, it was 1976.

MH: Now you mentioned 1957.

HO: That's when I came back to Arkansas.

[00:11:20] MH: Did you have any involvement with the Central High crisis at all?

HO: No. No. Actually, what happened there—I was a supervisor in the New York office with a criminal squad. And then when the integration crisis came along you referred to there, then they had to have a beef up of agents in Arkansas. And I had always had Arkansas as my office preference. And my seniority status came up for transfer, and I did get a transfer to Arkansas. But what I did was open a new resident agency in Russellville at that time. So I did—I worked very little of the integration crisis.

[00:12:04] MH: And that—is that where you finished out your career at Russellville or . . .

HO: No, no.

MH: . . . did you move around?

HO: No, I transferred from there on into Fort Smith. Ended it up

here in Fort Smith.

[00:12:15] MH: What kind of cases did you work in Arkansas here, in Russellville and in Fort Smith?

HO: All type—all cases that we had jurisdiction over.

MH: Bank robberies and . . .

HO: Right.

MH: Any ones that people would recall? Any big cases that people might recall?

HO: I don't know of any that were that big—outstanding in Arkansas that I recall but . . .

[00:12:40] MH: So let's see. When—I need to ask, I guess, about your family. Have you been married?

HO: Oh yes. Yeah.

MH: And what—tell me what your wife's name is, if you would.

HO: Dayle, *D-A-Y-L-E*. And she comes from Scott County, down in Waldron, down in that area. And we got married 1947. And it stuck.

MH: [*Laughs*] And stuck. Gr—well, that's great. It—was she somebody you knew growing up?

HO: No. No, I met her after I came back from World War II.

[00:13:15] MH: And you mentioned that you had been a—well, let me ask you first up, did you have children?

HO: Have two.

MH: Two?

HO: Have a boy and a girl.

MH: And where are they now?

HO: The boy's here in Fort Smith, and the girl is, too. She's a dental hygienist, and he works for USA Truck.

[00:13:37] MH: You mentioned that after you came back from the war, you became a deputy sheriff. Was that in Scott County, or Sebastian . . .

HO: That was in Scott County.

MH: Scott County. That—just that—it—what—that piece of involvement with law enforcement was what got you interested in doing other work in law enforcement, is that right?

HO: It had an influence on it, yes.

[00:13:59] MH: So you retired in [19]76.

HO: Yes.

MH: And then you continued in law enforcement, right? You . . .

HO: Nineteen seventy-seven I became chief of police in Fort Smith.

MH: Can you describe Fort Smith at the time, 1976? What was life like here in western Arkansas?

HO: Well, it was a rather quiet little city. But there had been a little bit of turmoil at the time, but it was a pleasant job.

MH: Well, Fort Smith and the border counties have always had a kind of a wild and wooly reputation. Did you see any of that nineteenth-century wildness in Fort Smith at that time or in Sebastian County?

HO: Not particularly.

[00:15:01] MH: So as chief of police, you—di—you had—what kind of equipment did you have? Did you have modern equipment, radios and cars and—did you have to build that up or change that?

HO: No, not at that time. It was coming along normally.

MH: And what year was it that you became chief of police? I think—did you mention . . .

HO: It was in—it was 1977.

MH: Nineteen seventy-seven.

HO: And I retired from there in 1982.

[00:15:33] MH: How did you first get to know Bill Clinton?

HO: I first—my first real brush with Bill Clinton was on the Fort Chaffee situation, personally.

MH: And where did—let's see. You were not chief at that time?

HO: Yes.

MH: You were chief at that time.

HO: Yes.

MH: So you were reporting to the governor, as were various authorities in this area and the state police?

HO: No. What happened was, of course—what I was referring to was the Fort Chaffee situation with the Cubans.

MH: Right. Yeah.

HO: I was chief of police at that time, when that happened. And of course, Bill Clinton was the governor.

MH: Right.

HO: And it was through that activity that I met Bill Clinton.

[00:16:21] MH: And this would've been—let's see. Nineteen—the spring of 1980? Is it—the spring of 1980 is when you . . .

HO: I—yes.

MH: . . . got to know Bill Clinton? What was your initial impression of him?

HO: Well, my impression was good because he answered our prayers. He came to our aid. And I was in Kansas City attending a funeral when that happened, when the Cubans revolted out there, but they called me and told me, and I kept in touch, and I came home. And I found out that Bill Cauthron had called Bill Clinton, and he immediately made all resources available to the county and to Fort Smith and had actually come on in to Fort Smith to check on it personally in that situation.

And then he came back later when we were trying to get the camp moved out of here. We didn't want those people in the county or in the city. They were all criminals, and we were trying to get that thing closed down. We didn't want them to be sponsored out into this area particularly. Or I didn't. And he came to our aid there and helped us get that camp closed.

[00:17:37] MH: The resettlement of Vietnamese refugees also took place somewhat earlier at Fort Chaffee.

HO: Yes.

MH: How did that go? Was that—did that work s . . .

HO: That was smooth.

MH: . . . smoothly?

HO: That was relatively smooth. We didn't have any problems with the Vietnamese out there.

MH: Was—what was the difference? We'll get more into the Cuban crisis . . .

HO: Well, the Vietnamese people were just normal, good-citizen-type people, hard-working people, and so forth, law-abiding people. These Cubans that came in were—he emptied his penitentiaries, if you remember . . .

MH: Yep.

HO: . . . in that situation. And they were all criminals, pretty well,

that came into this country.

[00:18:21] MH: There are some people who would dispute that. Did you—how do you know that they were criminals?

HO: Well, we were told that. And we were told that he had opened the doors to all the penitentiaries so we knew that through the public—I mean, through the news.

MH: Did you, when you first heard that the Cubans were coming here, did you anticipate any difficulty, any trouble?

HO: Well, we didn't know. We just, you know . . .

MH: I guess you'd have to look back at the Vietnamese, the experience with Vietnamese refugees. When did you begin to . . .

HO: Well, that would be a different situation. I mean, entirely different. I mean, those people were, you know, they were coming here under different circumstances.

[00:19:11] MH: So when did you first learn that there was trouble there? Did you hear that in Kansas City, or did you . . .

HO: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

MH: So . . .

HO: My office called me and told me that they were rioting and, you know, and looked like they were gonna break out, which they did. And of course they went out into the county, and they were

in the county then, and of course, we all—the Fort Smith Police Department had to do was to cooperate with the county the best we could and put stops in every—where they might come—try to come into Fort Smith. And it was a dangerous time, not only for them, but for them because people in this area immediately loaded their guns, and they were ready to go, and it could've been a slaughter. It could've been a slaughter.

[00:20:03] MH: Arkansas has, in many ways, been transformed by Hispanics moving into the state, but at that time, I would assume that the Hispanic population of the state and in western Arkansas was fairly small.

HO: Right.

MH: Is that correct? Were there Latinos operating businesses in Fort Smith or were—before the Cuban crisis, were there . . .

HO: Yes, I understand what you're asking. I was trying to think back. I'm sure there were some, but we had not had any trouble with them as a group.

MH: So at the peak, I guess there was 18,000 Cubans in the camp?

HO: I assume. I don't know. I don't remember.

MH: So I guess May 26 is the first flare up of trouble. Where were you on the 26th? Were you here or had you still been . . .

HO: No, I was in Kansas City.

MH: Right. Kay.

[00:21:03] HO: I was up there to a funeral. My wife's family.

MH: And so I think the next day Governor Clinton then came to Fort Chaffee.

HO: Yes.

MH: Did you meet him at that point?

HO: No. I was still—I was comin' in, so I did not see him then. I knew he had been there.

MH: And what—how many days after that was it before you met him?

HO: Well, it was some days later because we were tryin' to get them to close the camp and we—then we were in contact with him trying to get that done, and he worked hard on it and then came back up here for a meeting that we had. And that was really my first real contact with him. But he had cooperated fully with us. He had gone beyond what others had done in the past.

[00:21:56] MH: At that time, Clinton was still relatively young, and many people thought he was too young to be governor. Did you feel at all like his youth hampered him in any way in being governor?

HO: No.

MH: So you were willing to—perfectly willing to, in a sense, work for him at that point, even though you were highly experienced and

much older and perhaps wiser at that point? You d . . .

HO: Well, I don't [*laughs*] know about that but—wiser. But what happened was I retired from the Fort Smith Police Department. And my wife and I immediately took off and took a little vacation. We went to the West Coast. And while we were traveling I—and I asked my wife how she re—if she could remember how he got our phone number. But anyhow, he got our phone number and called me in California and wanted to know if I would handle this campaign in Fort Smith. And I told him I would think about it, and then, of course, Bill Cauthron called me, and he, you know, said, "Please do it," you know, and all on it. And so I decided to do it.

[00:23:19] MH: We're gonna get into the campaign and your later work with the governor. I wanna go back to the Fort Chaffee crisis just to get a better feel for what went on and what you saw and, you know, who you talked to. So the governor came down a few days after the initial . . .

HO: He came down the next day.

MH: Next day. Yeah, the twenty-seventh.

HO: He was called up, and he was here the next day.

MH: And what was security like at Fort Chaffee at that point when the first unrest began?

HO: Well, what it was is they were put into a compound, and you just had the normal security type thing at that point. And then, of course, then they began rioting, and they did break out and go. And after that, of course, there were more security in—put in place.

[00:24:12] MH: So when you say normal security—gate cards . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . at the various entrances . . .

HO: That's right.

MH: . . . to the camp. And that was regular army who were providing that security.

HO: No, the state police was part of that, too, and sheriff's office. They were all involved in it. And I'm not sure, but I believe they hired some civilians, also.

NH: Did you have any discussions with the commanding officer at Fort Chaffee at this point?

HO: I had several unpleasant discussions with him, yes. I, you know . . .

MH: Did—ha—did you have a relationship with him . . .

HO: No.

MH: . . . before all this happened? I mean, did you know him and . . .

HO: No.

MH: You didn't. Okay. [00:24:58] And you say that you had some unpleasant discussions. Was that about security at the camp or . . .

HO: Well, I felt that he and others were trying to keep those people there so it'd keep their job. Their job security. [*MH laughs*] And I felt by keeping them there, they were affecting the security of Fort Smith, so I wanted 'em out. And with the help of Bill Clinton, we've succeeded.

[00:25:30] MH: At one point the CO said that the army had no authority to detain the Cubans. Was—how did you react to that?

HO: Well [*laughs*], they certainly did. They were on their base, and that general was runnin' the base. Now it's true that later on they kinda changed around, and I'm not completely sure in my own mind right now if—exactly when that happened and all but—I think you're gonna be talking to Deloin Causey, but later I think Deloin can straighten that out.

[00:26:10] MH: Yeah, there was at least—[*clears throat*] 'scuse me—at least a disconnect between the Pentagon, the White House, and the governor, and law enforcement in this area. And some might say a kind of a neglect. What was your impression about the word that was coming from Washington to the commanding

officer and maybe to the governor?

HO: Well, I don't know exactly what was coming down. I—all I felt was that this general was trying to feather his own nest. And I felt that they should be gotten on out of here for the safety of the citizens of Sebastian County. And I felt strongly about it, and I guess I voiced too much, but I did express it.

[00:27:02] MH: So at about this time, fear was kinda building up in the population in Barling and Jenny Lind. They didn't know what these people were, who they were. Was it a matter of building tension over time?

HO: Well, it—you know, it ha—that night when that all happened, you know, it shook 'em up. And like I said, they all started armin' themselves with the guns. And they were ready if they came back again. And it would've been a terrible situation. Terrible situation. But number two, they were the type people that we really—or I didn't. Maybe the average person would, but I didn't think they were part of us and should be part of us.

MH: And you mean—you're talking about the Cubans.

HO: Get 'em on out of here [*laughs*] is what I was talkin' about, yes.

MH: So June 1 there was another kind of uprising, and there were a thousand—I'm sorry. People talked about it as being a war zone at Chaffee. Can you tell me about your experience during this

second uprising of the Cubans? Again, the population—many people were—had their hunting rifles out on the front porch, and there was some fear and some tension.

HO: Sure.

MH: Can you describe for me how that—how you viewed that. If you were gonna paint a picture of the whole situation there, what would you put in it?

HO: Well, it's just like you described it there, you know. This all—this uprising was taking place, and people didn't know but what they may come right into their house or what have you on it, and they were ready. They were getting ready.

[00:28:50] MH: So the state police and, I guess, some deputies . . .

HO: State police and the county and the city. We helped, too, on that thing.

MH: So that's—y'all were able to push the Cubans back into the camp?

HO: Right.

MH: And some people were hurt during that time. Well, let me ask you about the—and you were there during that effort to contain the Cubans to Fort Chaffee?

HO: Oh yes.

MH: What was it like? Did—was it hand-to-hand fighting, people

throwing things, or . . .

HO: Well, you're talking about the riot itself?

MH: Yeah.

HO: I was not there when that happened. But certainly they were making a lot of noise and fighting and running and going, and they broke out of the compound and went off the base on that thing.

MH: And so law enforcement was outnumbered terribly.

HO: Oh yes, at that time.

MH: Twenty to one is one thing . . .

HO: I'm sure. I don't know of the numbers, but when it first happened, yes.

MH: Did you—at that time, did you wonder whether or not you and the law enforcement folks and the state police would be able to contain them? What was your thinking about—what would've happened had they escaped?

HO: Well, of course, I was in Kansas City when that happened.

[00:30:05] MH: Oh, right. This is the second—I guess I'm referring to the second kind of uprising.

HO: Well, it wasn't nearly as bad as that first one.

MH: Oh, really? Interesting.

HO: The first one's when they went off the base.

MH: Let's see.

HO: To my knowledge. I mean, you know.

MH: The—I guess my understanding of this, and you can correct me if you will, is that there was, at one point, a couple of hundred who burned the barracks and, you know, had a riot, and some escaped from the base. But then the few days later on June 1 was when the real serious fighting occurred. Were you in Arkansas at that point on June 1?

HO: No, that's when I was in Kansas City.

MH: Still . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . on your way back. [00:30:53] That must have been something to hear that kinda news comin' outta your town . . .

HO: Yes.

MH: . . . and your county. Did you follow it on the radio or on TV or . . .

HO: Well, I—phone call.

MH: So you just kept . . .

HO: I was in constant contact with my officers on that thing. And then I came home.

MH: And I think during that June 1 unrest, there—a bunch of state police were injured, and a couple of the Cubans . . .

HO: Yes.

MH: . . . were actually shot. What did [*laughs*]—what was your feeling coming back into that from Kansas City, you know? It's like Sebastian County at war.

HO: Well, my feeling was, of course, we had to get enough security forces to contain 'em and then to start work to get 'em on outta here.

MH: So . . .

HO: And you know, in other circumstances maybe it would be more confinement, easier confinement, than out there.

[00:31:53] MH: Do you—did you have any knowledge of the governor's communications with President Carter during this time?

HO: No. I know he did but . . .

MH: Let's see. I think that the governor had called up some National Guard troops . . .

HO: Yes.

MH: . . . like maybe 150, to improve the security. That must've taken all of your deputies to work on that and almost nothing else. Is that the way it was?

HO: No. You—are you talkin' about the compound itself? Well, see, that was the county. So we did not—the Fort Smith Police

Department did not. Now we had some people that were employed out there part time, so forth, on it, but no. It was mainly the state police and the Sebastian County Sheriff's Office.

[00:32:50] MH: Let's see. Later in the summer—well, tell me about your communications with the governor when you got back. You just—you talked to him on the phone and met him when he came here?

HO: Yes.

MH: Okay. Did he confide in you at all about the larger picture, his relations with Washington and the army? Did you talk to him about that at all?

HO: We didn't go into any detail on it. I just knew that he had been, and I knew he was working to assist us very diligently in that regard.

[00:33:31] MH: So later in the summer, the president sent more Cubans . . .

HO: Yeah.

MH: . . . to Fort Chafee.

HO: They were arriving almost daily out there.

MH: And from what I understand, he had promised the governor that he wouldn't do that.

HO: Yeah.

MH: And then he went back on it and sent these—10,000, I think the number was, and they were the difficult—the people that were difficult to place in Miami or wherever they were being—Wisconsin, wherever they were being held. Did you see a difference in the quality of the Cubans in that second group of 10,000, the hard-to-place Cubans? Were they different from the . . .

HO: I d—I did not.

MH: So they were pretty much this—you didn't see . . .

HO: As far as I was concerned.

[00:34:24] MH: So at that point the governor announced that he was working on the Fort Chaffee security plan. Did you have any involvement in putting that together?

HO: Well, I was at the meeting. But mainly it was put together by the sheriff and the state police and the guard.

MH: And so I guess by 1981, the crisis had more or less settled, and Cubans were being placed elsewhere. Did you see a—an end, a particular end, to that—to the crisis?

HO: Well, I began to see it after we had one big meeting out there that got 'em all together, and we made it clear that we wanted 'em out of there. And they did eventually start getting 'em on out and . . .

[00:35:27] MH: Well, let me ask you a little bit about your work with the governor on—your political work with the governor. Your first impress—you met him during the crisis, and how did you later become involved in the campaigns?

HO: Well, as—through him—he called me and asked me if I would. And of course, I knew Nancy Hernreich, who is—had normally handled his campaign, and she contacted me. And I talked to Bill Clinton—I mean, to Bill Cauthron. And I decided it was a worthwhile project, and I decided to do it.

[00:36:05] MH: And the Hernriechs are a family that has—that have been in Fort Smith for quite a while, is that right?

HO: Oh yes. Oh yes.

MH: They had a broadcasting company there?

HO: Well, that and jewelry, jewelry store.

MH: So at that time, Sebastian County was a Republican stronghold, and you were going to work with a Democratic governor. Did that—did you feel like you were one voice among many Republican voices?

HO: Well, yes and no. But we knew we had an uphill battle. But we were gonna fight it, and we did. And while he did not take Sebastian County at that time, or Fort Smith, he got more votes that year than he had ever gotten before in this area here.

[00:36:59] MH: Di—had you been a lifelong Democrat or no party or either party?

HO: I had generally voted the Democrat ticket, yes. But I guess at that time in the very beginning, I probably would have considered myself kind of an independent. I voted both.

MH: And what was the—the two parties—what kind of political organizations did they have in Sebastian County and Fort Smith?

HO: Well, we just had the one headquarters, and of course, we worked out of that headquarters and did what we needed to do to get the word out and to also set up areas for, you know, signs and that type of thing and to get his name before them.

[00:37:50] MH: And what was the Republican organization like with—they—I guess they were somewhat comfortable because they'd—they carried the county—carried for Republicans prior to that. Were they takin' it easy, or did they have a real active and . . .

HO: Oh, no . . .

MH: . . . aggressive . . .

HO: . . . they were very active. They were active.

[00:38:11] MH: As part of your work, did you work to build the party in the county, in western Arkansas?

HO: Well, we did everything that we could to do so, yes.

MH: What did that involve? Just knocking on doors and . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . talking to people and enlisting people to volunteer and that sort of thing?

HO: Right.

MH: Was there—did you go from a small number to a large number, or just building as you went?

HO: Well, we went from a very small number to a larger number all right, but we never did have a huge number to help us in the campaign. But we had enough. I mean, we were able to get the—another problem, of course, was to get the political signs up in the yards and that type of thing. And that took a little problem because, as you said, it was a Republican stronghold. And there were people that said no, but we contacted 'em and tried anyway. And we were successful, I think.

[00:39:13] MH: Were the—were there the usual, for that time, hijinks? People stealing signs, knocking down signs . . .

HO: Oh yes.

MH: . . . and those sorts of things? So it was pretty . . .

HO: That's normal.

MH: . . . it was a pretty tough [*HO laughs*] political environment. I don't imagine it was violent, but it's hard fought, I guess, right? Is that correct?

HO: Yes.

[00:39:33] MH: Now, in the governor's first reelection campaign, it's often said that car tags and Cubans [*HO laughs*] were what allowed Frank White to defeat him. What was—did he—I assume that you talked to people about the car tags issue. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

HO: Well, of course, there was deep resentment because of that, of course—everybody—that hit everybody. And of course, they didn't like it, but—and that got him defeated that first time. Now we're way past that, though, here. See now, he won the election that I—as governor that I was involved in that year.

MH: Well, what year was that, just so we're on the record?

HO: Well, it would be—what—was it [19]83?

Unknown: Nineteen eighty-two.

HO: [Nineteen] eighty-two. And he—that's right, he'd be sworn in as governor in [19]83.

MH: What kind of work did you—did you travel to other counties in western Arkansas and do advance work for the governor?

HO: I was tryin' to think. No, I don't think I did. Now, my wife did.

MH: What kind of response did she and perhaps other people get in other counties to Clinton's candidacy?

HO: I don't think there was any problem, you know. Course, you

know, there's always a situation there because of those car tags and what you have, what you just brought up on it.

MH: And the governor was, I guess, blamed for the riot and other unrest at Fort Chaffee.

HO: Well, he had to take some of the blame because they did come into his state. But I—it wasn't any—I don't remember that as ever becoming a big issue. I think the car tags were probably a bigger issue than that, really, when it came down to it.

[00:41:40] MH: You say that you were able to improve the margin of Democratic votes in—or I guess erode the Republican margin of votes in the county. How much was it? Ten percent or twenty or . . .

HO: I don't remember the percentage, I just remember that we did increase it, did better.

[00:42:07] MH: And at one point you—the governor asked you to come to Little Rock to be the director of the crime lab?

HO: Yes. Yes.

MH: Had you had that kind of experience to do that job from the FBI and law enforcement?

HO: Well, I had done supervisory work, you know, all throughout my whole career in the thing but—and I was deeply interested in that crime lab because, to be honest with you, it had gotten to a

point to where it was easier and quicker to send the stuff all the way to Washington, DC, than to go to Little Rock. They were just not performing what they should have been doing. And so I was glad to take the job.

MH: Can you tell me just for reference what year it was that you came to Little Rock to do that job?

HO: Yeah, it was nineteen—let's see. It was July of 1984. And I stayed there until June 1985.

[00:43:13] MH: What kind of funding did the crime lab have at that point? And what—how many employees?

HO: How many employees? I'm trying to remember. I don't remember exactly. But I would say forty or fifty employees.

MH: And . . .

HO: All together.

MH: And was the crime lab adequately funded at that point?

HO: Yes.

MH: It's had difficulties over the years, and I think probably still has some difficulties keeping up with the pace of the work that they have to do. What was the pace like when you first arrived there?

HO: Terrible. It was a situation where you might have to wait weeks to get a determination. Even the—on the autopsies and so forth,

which it should not have been. And to make a long story short, I can exaggerate it from—during that period of time from going three years down to three weeks. And the commissioners that were over there at the crime lab, they kept saying, "Well, you gotta get more money. You gotta give them"—we didn't need more money. We just needed them to work. And we got 'em to work.

MH: So it was really a matter of management and supervision . . .

HO: That's right.

MH: . . . rather than restructuring or any of these sorts of things?

HO: That's right.

[00:44:37] MH: And how much interest did the governor have in the crime lab's operation at that point?

HO: Oh, he's got a big interest in it because you've got a sheriff in every county in this state, and you got police departments all over the state, and if it's not functioning properly, it goes back to the governor.

MH: How often did you report to the governor? Did you report directly to the governor?

HO: I did, but I did not just on a regular basis. I mean . . .

MH: So just . . .

HO: I didn't have to. We were doing well. I mean, we started doing

well and did better and better and better, and I'm—I think that they finally realized what the situation was. In fact, I'll give you an example. I was pushing one section there because it's firearms identification section where—we had a lot of work there, you know, in that area on that thing. And anyway, I—the supervisor didn't do any examining. And I put him on a—I put a quota on him and everybody else, you know. I said, "Let's get this done," in that situation. And we got down to the point where we could do it almost daily. And the guy heading up the backlog situation there that assigned it out come over, and he says, "You know, we're gonna get in trouble." He said, "You know, these people gettin' their work done too quick." I said, "I don't care if they get it done the next hour. Just get back there and get with it, you know." And that was their attitude.

[00:46:23] MH: Was that . . .

HO: They thought—I think they thought job security meant a wait in the situation. I mean, that's terrible to say, but I think that was the situation.

MH: So you kinda had to give 'em a jolt to . . .

HO: That's correct.

MH: Kind of a boot in the pants to get them to focus and . . .

HO: Get goin'.

MH: . . . work a little harder and . . .

HO: I put a quota on 'em.

MH: So many firearms identifications and . . .

HO: Yeah.

MH: . . . so many autopsies, so many . . .

HO: Right.

[00:46:50] MH: And when did you leave the crime lab?

HO: About a year later.

MH: And at that time, did you go to work for the governor in . . .

HO: No.

MH: . . . the governor's office?

HO: No, I just retired, and a young fella's been my assistant there, Jim Clark, took over, and I knew he could do a good job. And I was ready to go home but—and I thought the job was coming along fine and the crime lab was doing well, and so I went home.

MH: So you came back to Fort Smith.

HO: Fort Smith, yeah.

MH: And during all this time, your children were growing up. Did all of your involvement, did that have any effect on them? Did you get to see them very often?

HO: Well, I missed seeing them. But I'd come home every weekend and . . .

MH: Oh. [00:47:41] So you came back, and the governor called you again. And asked you to come back to Little Rock.

HO: Right.

MH: And you served as chief of staff?

HO: No. No, this was—I came back as liaison to law enforcement.

MH: I see.

HO: In his office at that point.

[00:47:59] MH: And what did that involve?

HO: Well, it—just exactly what it said there. It was the state liaison to all the local law enforcement agencies around. And while I was there, he decided to work on the state budget. And he wanted to combine two agencies. The transportation agency and the highway safety agency. He wanted to combine 'em. And of course, I got involved in that and eventually ended up having to actually prepare the budget for that situation and that change. And some of it's kinda difficult because in those days we had some commissioners that actually had automobiles. I couldn't believe that, but they had automobiles. We had to take those away from 'em and so forth in the budget and all, which didn't set well with them. And wasn't too well set with politically on the situation either, but it was—Clinton was trying to save money is what he was trying to do. And not lose anything in the

process. And so we did. And then he asked me if I would go on over and start the agency and get it goin' and so forth, which I did on the thing.

[00:49:22] MH: So you kinda laid out the groundwork and put together the framework . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . for the new agency. Did you get input from . . .

HO: Well, not all of it. I'm sure that, you know, Betsey Wright and others had a great deal of function in there, but I finally ended up doin' the budget and some of those things, yes.

MH: What kind of involvement did the governor have? What kind of input did he have?

HO: Oh, he was there, you know, every day on the thing. If there's any questions about it or anything and . . .

[00:49:52] MH: Did you gauge the political effect of, say, taking away the cars? Was that—were people up in arms about that? Were commissioners up in arms about it?

HO: Well, they didn't like it, but Governor Clinton was all for it too, I mean, you know, so we weathered the storm on it, I mean. And it was some of it—they didn't need those automobiles, and we knew that. And so we took 'em away.

[00:50:20] MH: Now the—did you also continue to work on budgets

for law enforcement? Is that the only thing you focused on at that point?

HO: Well, I ho—had—no. While I was doing that, I also had a responsibility to work with law enforcement agencies, but it was—we didn't prepare their budget, of course. We didn't have anything to do with that. The governor wouldn't have anything to do with that. But if they had a problem, I would try to take care of it for them, you know.

MH: Well, we've actually been talking for about an hour, so if we could, Mr. Oliver, maybe we can take a short break . . .

HO: Yeah.

MH: . . . and get you out of the lights and kind of reconvene in a little bit?

HO: That'd be fine.

[Recording stopped]

[00:51:12] MH: Let me go back and kind of build on some of the things that we talked about earlier. First of all, can you explain what the issue was with the car tags in Clinton's reelection campaign?

HO: No. You're talkin' about why he raised 'em?

MH: Ye—why he raised 'em and . . .

HO: I just have to assume it's for income for the roads or something.

I—but I don't know. I really don't know. I'm sorry.

MH: But what upset people was that the cost of . . .

HO: Cost of it, yes.

MH: . . . registering vehicles rose.

HO: It's just like adding a tax, and you know how that goes.

MH: And everybody in the state who has a car has to pay that so . . .

HO: Had to pay it. Yeah.

MH: . . . it had a widespread effect, I guess, on . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . people's attitudes. [00:51:59] Let me ask you about your role in—back at Fort Chaffee again. When people began to be critical of the governor for his handling of the crisis, did you at any time go and offer another explanation to the press and to people about the governor's role? Did you defend him?

HO: I don't remember ever going to the press and doing it, but with individuals, certainly I did, and so did Bill Cauthron because of his coming to our aid quickly.

MH: Kay.

HO: He had nothing to do with that, really. I don't know how he could have stopped the start of it, but he did come to our aid when it was needed.

[00:52:54] MH: Yeah, that's—the question of the federal

government's relationship with the state during all this—it's not the George Wallace states' rights issue, but it is a—in a sense, it is an issue about the rights of the state to, you know, have security within its own borders. Did you look at it that way at the time?

HO: Well, what it amounted to was this: We had this space out here at Fort Chaffee that had been utilized for a little bit of everything, and they knew that. The federal government knew that. And of course, they utilized it here in this situation with the Cubans. Now of course, my objection and our objection was the type of people that they were bringing in. And of course, another objection is why did Carter ever let this thing take place? I mean, you know, why didn't he stop 'em and send 'em back? I mean.

[00:53:53] MH: So do you feel that Arkansas didn't get a fair shake [*unclear words*]?

HO: Yes, I agree with that. Yes.

MH: What sort of fund-raising did you do for the governor?

HO: Just normal.

MH: Goin' around talking to people . . .

HO: People. Uh-huh.

MH: . . . and they'd—you al—people you'd already had relationships

with or . . .

HO: Mainly, and of course, some others, but my role in that, mainly, really, was just for the local campaign, not too much for the—for his statewide campaign.

[00:54:31] MH: Did you—di—were you the one to introduce the governor when he came here? When he came to speak, did you . . .

HO: I usually did, yes.

MH: And what sort of impression did you form of him during the first couple of administrations? Did you find him to be level headed? Did you find him to be, you know, mercurial? Maybe moody? I don't know. Let me just . . .

HO: No, actually, I found he was a man you could sit down and talk to.

MH: And so you felt comfortable with him from the start.

HO: Yes. I mean, you know, I never had any problems talking to Bill Clinton.

MH: And he would take your calls whenever you called while you were . . .

HO: I don't know that he ever . . .

MH: . . . Fort Smith and . . .

HO: . . . but if—he might not have been there, but he would return

my calls, yes.

MH: Yeah. [00:55:25] Let's go—move on a little bit to the time when you were chief of staff. What was the year that you became chief of staff?

HO: That was in 1990, March of 1990 to April of [19]91.

MH: And Betsey Wright had been chief of staff prior to that for several years.

HO: For a hundred years.

MH: Yeah. [*Laughter*] Hundred years. And I would think that you—the two of you probably have different styles of management. Wh—did you find you had to adapt to the system when you became chief of staff, or did you reorganize or further organize the staff?

HO: No, it—I just stepped in where she left off.

[00:56:16] MH: And did you—well, let me ask you, who reported to you as chief of staff in the administration?

HO: Well, the whole staff, really, I guess you would say. I . . .

MH: Now, as chief of staff, you organized those folks, and did you have—can you think of any big issues that you had to deal with or the administration had to deal with during that term?

HO: I do not—I don't remember any unpleasant issues. There were things that would come up daily, you know, from around the

state. This guy would want this or that or the other, but I don't remember any large issues coming up. [00:57:07] Now during my tenure there, it was a lege—we did have a legislative session, and that's always a headache.

[00:57:18] MH: Yeah, let me ask you about that. The governor had a hands-on approach to working with the legislature?

HO: Yes.

MH: Did you have a free hand, also, to do what you needed to do with the legislature?

HO: Oh yes, yes. Although, now, let me put it this way. I always discussed any important issues with him, you know. He was the guiding force in this thing. But he never, you know, second guessed us on it.

MH: Can you give me an example, maybe, that would illustrate how involved the governor got in the legislative session?

HO: Well, of course, he reviewed—as far as I know, he reviewed practically every bill that was coming up that he would eventually have to sign or something on it. And course, if there were any issues in there, he would want 'em clarified. And I don't remember any specific instance or all on that, but there would have been instances, of course, that would have come up that—you know, where he would wanna make sure that this bill

passed or this bill was changed and so forth. But he kept a tight rein. He really did. And of course, my job was to help him and to help carry it out.

[00:58:51] MH: I was gone from Arkansas during this time, so I don't know much about what occurred in that session, and we don't need to—I won't ask you to [*HO laughs*] tell me what you don't remember or what you don't know, but . . .

HO: No.

MH: . . . c—was—were the old lions still in the legislature at that point? Max Howell and . . .

HO: Pretty well most of 'em were, yes, still there. I don't remember exactly who all was there, but yes . . .

MH: How . . .

HO: . . . to answer your question. But . . .

MH: How did the governor deal with those guys? Knox Nelson . . .

HO: Face to face.

MH: And were they cooperative?

HO: Yes.

MH: [*Laughs*] Okay.

HO: For the most part. I don't remember any time that, you know, that—now there were discussions of course, you know, back and forth and all. But—no, they were . . .

[00:59:50] MH: Let's see now, as chief of staff, what were your relations with the staff? How did—did you have weekly meetings with—staff meetings, or did you have monthly meetings or just meet with the heads of departments?

HO: Just met when we felt we needed to. There was no set weekly meeting for everybody or anything like that.

MH: Did you have warm relationships with people on the staff? Did you . . .

HO: Yes.

MH: . . . friendly relations and . . .

HO: Far as I know, I didn't have any problem.

MH: How would you . . .

HO: I—only problem I had was I think in one instance I did let one go, but that was a situation that was not unpleasant. It was a situation that just had to be for health reasons and so forth that had to take place.

[01:00:44] MH: When you had, in a sense, taken care of the highway department and laid the groundwork for the new agency, and then you—well, in the course of this, you also sort of got the crime lab working again. Did you view the chief of staff job as simply a management job? Did you see it as a matter of employing basic principles of management, or did you have to do

some fancy steppin'?

HO: Well, no, I think management, mainly. To make sure, you know, that things were—that these people were doing what job they were assigned to. And you know, once in a while, you might get a complaint, and you'd have to go into it and see, but no, for the most part, they did what they were supposed to do.

MH: How would you describe your management style?

HO: I was tough.

MH: Did you require people to do what they . . .

HO: Were supposed to do.

MH: . . . said they were gonna do, and what they're supposed to do?

HO: Yeah.

MH: Did you give them a free hand in deciding how to do that?

HO: Oh yes. Yes, yes.

MH: And you wanted the results.

HO: I didn't go in and look over their shoulder and say, you know, "I believe you need to dot that *I* and so forth." Oh no. They were experienced people. They knew what they were doing. And my job was—it had complications at time, but it was fairly simple, really, because they were good people. They were good people.

[01:02:22] MH: Did you enjoy that work during that time?

HO: Well, [*laughs*] I was ready to retire, you know, and I—Bill Clinton

called me and talked to me about it, and they were concerned about it getting through the legislation process. And so I—that's—I took it. I said, "I'll take it through that, and then we'll go from there." And I did. I knew I had a hard rock to follow. You know, I was following Betsey Wright, who'd been there for years and years and who knew that thing backwards and forwards, and I did not. But you know, I've always—and I've been told this later by many, many people wherever I've been that I was tough, but I was fair. And that's what I tried to be.

[01:03:09] MH: Yeah, how would you describe the staff generally? Were they highly idealistic? Were they just nose-to-the-grindstone folks or—how would you describe them?

HO: I think they were all good people. They were substantially interested in their job and doing what they needed to do for Bill Clinton and the job they were hired to do. And the state of Arkansas.

[01:03:35] MH: Was there a time when you kinda looked at Bill Clinton and thought, "Man, this guy is goin' places"? Did you ever have a feeling that, you know, he might—before he announced, did you ever have a feeling that, you know, he might go to higher office and possibly be president?

HO: I never did give it any thought prior.

MH: You were just focusing on what you had to do and . . .

HO: Yeah.

[01:03:57] MH: Now, when he—he had promised not to run for president, and then changed his mind, I guess, or in any case he announced then that he was gonna have to break his promise and run for president. What do you think the reaction around the state was like, just from the people you know and people you've known for a long time?

HO: I don't think anyone was surprised.

MH: There was some resentment, though . . .

HO: Oh, I'm sure.

MH: . . . in some quarters.

HO: I'm sure.

[01:04:27] MH: How did you feel about that? Was that—you s . . .

HO: Well, I don't think it bothered me either way, you know.

MH: And you were—you say you were ready to retire at that point. Did you ever consider staying with the governor and campaigning with him or for him?

HO: Well, of course, when I came back home, I was fairly active in the campaign, and my wife was, too. In fact, she was one of the Travelers that went to other states and campaigned for him.

MH: And that was a group who were known as the Arkansas

Travelers . . .

HO: That's it.

MH: . . . who would go to Iowa, for example . . .

HO: Yeah.

MH: . . . and get—do . . .

HO: I know she went to Texas and a couple of places.

MH: And they would campaign for the governor sort of face-to-face with the . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . folks before . . .

HO: Right.

MH: . . . primaries and whatnot. [01:05:23] Let's see. Now, after he became president, did you have occasion to offer any advice about, for instance, the Justice Department or the FBI? Did he ever talk to you about any of that stuff?

HO: Yeah. I discussed with him on one occasion that's set out in his book about the director of the FBI at—and I told him I thought that guy was gonna be a bad choice. And he went [*laughs*] ahead and appointed him anyway. And I think actually regretted it if you take a look at his book and what he said about it so—but yes, I did.

MH: And . . .

HO: I probably shouldn't have, but I did.

MH: And who was that director?

HO: That was [*laughs*]—I can't . . .

MH: Louis . . .

HO: . . . even tell you his name.

MH: Louis Freeh?

HO: Huh?

MH: Louis Freeh or . . .

HO: Yeah.

MH: You said that was him.

HO: Yeah.

MH: In what year would that have been?

HO: Well, that would've been his first appointment there. I don't know—I don't remember the year.

[01:06:33] MH: I wanted to go back—well, let me ask you about your retirement. You've—you'd been—[*clears throat*] 'scuse me—working at a feverish pace, I guess, for a lot of years. What did you do when you finally did retire?

HO: When I retired?

MH: Yes.

HO: Little of nothing. [*Laughs*]

MH: Little of nothin'.

HO: Just visited with my family and took care of my household and my business. And when I say business, I meant, you know, the upkeep of the family home and that type of thing.

MH: And are you now on the Civil Service Commission?

HO: No, I resigned from that just this last month.

[01:07:16] MH: Have you ever had thoughts about getting into public life again?

HO: No, no. No. Too old. [*Laughter*]

[01:07:25] MH: I wanna ask about—I'm not sure if this—if you had any involvement with this or not, but in the mid-[19]80s, there was a sort of a groundswell of neo-Nazis and armed, violent extremist groups in Arkansas. At one point, they targeted Franklin—federal Judge Franklin Waters and had scouted the courthouse here in—I guess, planning to do something similar to what Timothy McVeigh had done in—in the future would do in Oklahoma City. Did you have any involvement with that?

HO: No.

MH: Did you—there was some activity around Fort Smith as well.

HO: No.

MH: Okay. Okay. Let me ask you if there's anything that we haven't covered that you would like to speak to?

HO: No, I can't think of anything.

MH: Okay.

HO: Pretty well covered the gamut.

MH: Great. Well, it's been great to talk to you, and really appreciate sharing—you sharing all this with us.

HO: Well, I hope it was all right.

MH: It was great.

[End of interview 01:08:37]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]