RONALD REAGAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES F. KUHN

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Interviewers

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Knott: Do you have any questions, Jim, before we let it roll? In about three or four months you’ll get a lightly edited transcript and you can do with that transcript as you please. If you wish to make any changes, you can.

Kuhn: Okay. No, I think I’m ready to go. I’m just glad that the University of Virginia—in fact, I think it’s heartwarming and wonderful and very important from a public policy and historical standpoint that you’re doing this. I commend you highly.

Knott: Thanks. We enjoy doing it. It’s a very interesting job.

Kuhn: You both have a very important job. I’ll say this briefly and I’ll get off of this, but we’re out here fighting for clients and everything. If a client is paying, that’s important; you’ve got to deliver value and we take that very seriously. But in the end sometimes you just wonder, how important is my job? I’m out there trying to convince Senators or Representatives to vote our way or not to move legislation or to change some regulation or whatever. Even though I know we’ve got to do it because we’re hired to do it and in the end it’s important, I think of what all of you do, it is so important. I mean, you’re educators, and what’s more important than that?

Knott: Thank you.

Kuhn: So you do have important jobs, very important.

Knott: Thank you very much for being with us today.

Kuhn: I’m sorry that we didn’t get together on the 20th.

Knott: That was a memorable day.

Kuhn: They had only 48 subway cars running that day out of a fleet of 650 that they normally run on a daily basis, they had 48 running. That was a holiday, too, but still it was a mess, that whole week was a mess.

Knott: I think probably the best place to start is, you had mentioned to me that you had served as Reagan’s coordinator for Ohio. I don’t know if I have the title correct there, in 1976—
Kuhn: Pretty good.

Knott: If you could just talk about your early political experiences and we’ll go from there.

Kuhn: I met Ronald Reagan in the fall of 1975. I was working for a small industrial firm in Canton, Ohio. The head of this company was very political. He had run for the United States Senate in 1974 in a primary and lost, he ran against the mayor of Cleveland. His name was Peter Voss. He had lost to the mayor of Cleveland, a man who was mayor for eight years, ’70 to ’78, a gentleman by the name of Ralph Perk, who preceded Dennis Kucinich, whom so many people know of now as a Congressman and, as you know, is running for President. Perk had won and then Perk ran against John Glenn, and that’s when John Glenn got into the Senate.

But Peter Voss was very political, tied in with the Reagan campaign in 1976, in fact, the end of ’75. Going back to when I met Reagan, this Peter Voss had invited Reagan to come and speak to a group of businessmen in Cleveland that he had assembled. I was there. I was actually outside the room to wait for Reagan and his small entourage to come. When he approached the door, I went over and greeted him and shook his hand and he stopped and started talking to me. We started talking, it seemed like for a couple of minutes. I’m sure it was only a minute or so, but I finally had to tell him, I said, “Governor, you’ve got to go in there. These businessmen are waiting for you.” That’s how this guy was.

I had grown up watching him on the General Electric Theater on Sunday nights and I never really watched the plot or paid attention to what was going on in the actual acting, but he was the narrator in the beginning. As a young boy, there was something about it, he had so much personal appeal, I was intrigued that you always wanted to see him. Then of course Death Valley Days and different things—and I had never seen any of his movies growing up. But just that first time, I thought, Boy, he really is as warm and personable as he came off on TV. The fact that he wanted to talk to me just as much as he wanted to go in and talk to those men speaks highly for this man.

As it turns out, this gentleman who had invited him, Peter Voss, whom I worked for, did get to run the Reagan campaign in 1976 in Ohio. It wasn’t a big campaign because so many states had locked up for President [Gerald] Ford. There were a lot of statewide Republican organizations that were very upset that Reagan was challenging Ford, didn’t think it was in the best interests of the party, the country, and so there was a real split there. The end of ’75 they told Voss, “You’re going to run the state and we’re coming in.” Then in January of ’76 they said, “No, we’re not coming in.” Then they were; then they weren’t. So we really couldn’t put the state together because it looked like they were going to go, and then they were going to write Ohio off because it was so locked up with Ford: they were spinning their wheels, they’re going to waste money, there’s no value.

Finally then in late February, early March, they said, “We’re coming in. Organize the state.” So we had to really scramble, because you’ve got to get petitions in all these congressional districts to get delegates. That’s what it’s all about in the primary, as you know. So we had to get the state organized legally, climbing all over the place, flying all over the place. It was brutal. It took
weeks to do that and you’re on deadlines. Then the Reagans did come in and blitzed the state in the spring, it was a May primary. When they came in I got to meet the people like [Michael] Deaver and [Edwin] Meese and [Lyn] Nofziger and the Reagans themselves, got to see him again. Got to meet Mrs. [Nancy] Reagan on that trip. It was really a California group for the most part. Marty Anderson. Because of that, when that was over, I got to go to the convention. That was truly a great convention going back to ’76, that was really something to see.

Morrisroe: Could I ask you, how did Reagan strike you as a campaigner in the ’76 campaign?

Kuhn: Outstanding, very presidential. The ultimate communicator, drew large crowds, a lot of media coverage. He had his traveling media. For me, I was just a kid who grew up on a farm in northwestern Ohio, Seneca County, 30,000 people in the whole county. To see him, having seen him all those years, and to see him in action, to see how good he really was, and all the media traveling with him and national media that you recognize. He actually had some celebrities that traveled with him too back then, which was interesting. He had Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. So it’s really something.

Morrisroe: Mr. FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation].

Kuhn: Who else did I see? Ken Curtis who played Festus on Gunsmoke, he was with him. There were others. Oh, Jimmy Stewart. God, this is really something, you know? Aside from that, just Reagan himself. And the people themselves were all very nice. Gosh, Californian folks are really great people. Then to go to that convention, which was so exciting and all the support that Reagan had and that great speech he gave at the very end—

Knott: You were in the hall that night?

Kuhn: Yes, oh yes. They kept us real busy. I got to go out there, we worked that whole two-week period, the week before and the week of. When it was over, I thought, God, can this guy come back and run again or is he going to be too old? Well, fortunately for me, the California office had called folks like myself that they had gotten to know, and had asked folks like me to go out and do trips for him from time to time when he was out, as he said, on the “mashed potato circuit.” Because he never stopped traveling, he never stopped speaking, (a) he wanted to be visible; (b) he had his message; and (c) some of those speeches were paying him, which was fine.

Not all are. Unlike some people in this administration—and one person in particular whom I admire highly, near the very top—who would go to universities and colleges and would accept honorariums, which I think is wrong. I think if you’re going to an institution like that and you can afford it, you shouldn’t take their money. Even though you can say, “It’s not taxpayers’ money,” that money can be used for something else. Reagan never took a dime that I know of from a college or university. I may be wrong about that, but I don’t know that he ever did.

He would go to college campuses; he’d go to political events. There were organizations, it could have been the American Meatpackers Association, that’s fine, let them pay him. What they did was, when Reagan went somewhere, he usually liked to have somebody with him. So what the
California office would do—this was Deaver’s office that ran this operation, Helene Von Damm. Are you going to talk to Helene?

**Knoott:** She’s on our list.

**Kuhn:** She really knows that man.

**Knoott:** Really? Okay.

**Kuhn:** She was our ambassador to Austria. I don’t know if she stayed in Europe after that or where she is.

**Knoott:** I’m not sure.

**Kuhn:** But Reagan really thought the world of her. She was very close to him. Anyhow, they would call guys like myself, people who had done advance work, state coordinators or whatever, and say, “Can you go to Philadelphia? Can you go to Chicago, Dallas, Denver, whatever? Get in a day ahead of time, he’s speaking to such-and-such a group. He’s doing two or three speeches. Take him through it, work with the host, coordinate with them, make sure that they get what they want but take care of the Governor. Make sure we get what we need, you know, some press coverage,” this, that or whatever.

So you go in and kind of do the logistics, meet—as his representative—with the group just the day before and maybe coordinate some media coverage. The nice thing was, when he came in, normally—not always, but sometimes—he would come in by himself, and it would be just the two of you. You really got to spend some quality time with him. Then sometimes Deaver would come. But Deaver didn’t care, he’d go off and do something else or whatever. So you really got to know the man. You take him through a day’s worth of events, or maybe it was two days with an overnight. It was really something.

Peter Voss, whom I still worked for—in fact, I couldn’t do all the trips they asked me to do. They’d call a couple of times every quarter or so, and even though he was very political, I was working for him. He’d say, “Gee, you know, you just did a trip, maybe you’d better pass on this.” I’d take some vacation time or whatever. Usually, it seemed like I went out about once a quarter over that three- or four-year period. I wanted to do anything I could. I felt, If he’s going to run again, I want to be in a position to go on the campaign. Just had no idea. Seventy-eight was very busy, that was the off-year election. He did a lot of campaigning, we had a lot of travel that year. I remember he came into Ohio then, a couple of times.

Then when ’79 rolled around, you probably have the exact date, but in March of ’79 he filed his papers to form an exploratory committee for running for President, which allowed him to raise money. So it was really gaining momentum. Then I started getting calls from California from various people and it looked like it was coming together to go on staff. And then you know how things happen in life. I got a call from somebody I’d never heard of, named Nick Ruwe. He said, “Jim, I’m the new director of scheduling and advance.” I wanted to be an advance man for Reagan. You know what they do. You get in five days ahead of time, six, seven days ahead of
time, to make sure there’s something going on when the candidate gets there so that you have something to cover, and you generate media coverage.

Well I thought, *Who is this Nick Ruwe?* I had never heard of him. Then he said he used to work for [Richard] Nixon. I thought, *God—I had grown up as a Democrat. A lot of farmers back then, because of FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and the New Deal and everything, I’d grown up as a Democrat. In fact, when I went to school at Kent State, when the Constitution was changed that lowered the voting age, that said you were legally adult at 18—I’m trying to think what amendment that was—but in any event, I could vote for the first time in the ’72 election. I was 19 or 20 then and I voted for [George] McGovern. Of course, I was at Kent, I was a Democrat. In fact, I’ll throw in a few tidbits. Back then you may recall they had bumper stickers that said, “Nixon Now,” for his re-election. Well, we had a bunch of those at Kent, a bunch of them, and we cut the “w” off and it said, “Nixon No,” and they were all over the place.

**Knott:** When were you there again?

**Kuhn:** I was at Kent from the fall of ’70. I started after the shooting—

**Knott:** Just after.

**Kuhn:** I was just graduating from high school when that happened on May 4th. I was there ’70 through ’74. In fact, I think we lost about a third of our freshman class that year, didn’t come because of what happened at Kent. I talked to my parents about it and I said, “Look, what happened at Kent could have happened at 40 other campuses.” I don’t know how bad things were at Charlottesville then, maybe the same thing could have happened at UVA at that point in time.

I’ve got to get back on track here now. I was going back to ’78. Where was I?

**Morrisroe:** Doing advance work.

**Knott:** Nick Ruwe, the Nixon connection.

**Kuhn:** Nick Ruwe. So I called out to Helene Von Damm. Dave Fischer, somebody else you need to talk to—

**Knott:** Yes, I’ve been in touch with him.

**Kuhn:** He did what I did in the first term.

**Knott:** Right.

**Kuhn:** He’s here, he’s somewhere. I think he’s retired now, he’s a couple of years older than I am. He sold his business, has done very well. So I called out to Dave Fischer and others and said, “What’s going on?” And he said, “I don’t know. It’s John Sears, they brought Sears back to run the campaign again in ’76 and Sears is bringing his people in.” So there’s a lot of turmoil. I
mean, it was tumultuous. In fact, it got to the point where Deaver left the campaign. A couple of months later, Nofziger left too. I thought, This is going to come back. These guys are too important to Reagan and they have staying power. Eventually they’re going to come back if we get through these primaries.

Then going back to me, Nick Ruwe called and said he was having a seminar in Chicago and was inviting 50 advance guys. I thought, Wow, it doesn’t look like I’m going to get hired in. Here’s some new guy, Nixon guy, and I barely did any advance work for Reagan. My contacts were David Fischer and Deaver, and Deaver’s leaving. This doesn’t look very good. So we went to Chicago for a couple of days, this is October ’79, and I got a lucky break. He hired five of the 50 guys, full-time, salaried. The other guys got used either as volunteers in the beginning or eventually got on as we won more primaries. Then a lot of them got hired as we got in the general, but I was lucky enough to be one of the five guys that got hired on by Nick Ruwe. I didn’t think I had a chance.

In fact, I’ll tell you, Nick and I became very close then. You may recall, Reagan couldn’t fire anybody, but he did fire three people the day of the New Hampshire primary, February 26, 1980. We had lost the Iowa caucuses. Even though things were looking good in New Hampshire, the campaign wasn’t going the way he wanted it to go. There were problems with Charlie Black and Jim Lake being too aligned with Sears. So he fired the three of them. Nick Ruwe, out of loyalty, resigned. So he was gone then.

Well, when that happened, then Deaver came back, Nofziger came back. I can’t remember exactly when Lyn came back, but he eventually came back. Everything had gone full circle. But what I had done, I went through thirteen months on the campaign, it’s like November—might have been twelve and a half or whatever it was—but I actually started, I guess the end of October ’79 and went through the general, doing advance work.

It was interesting. When it was election night, if I can jump ahead to election night—

Knott: Sure.

Kuhn: November 4, 1980. Unbelievable. I’ve got to tell you something, I realized then what it really felt like to win something. You talk about football games or this or that, but it was the greatest feeling to be on a winning team. To be with him and to really win something big, that was just an unbelievable feeling. I’ll never forget that, something that important. Something that he achieved, being so fortunate and so honored to have the opportunity to go to work for him and help in just such a small way, and actually survive that and be part of that when it was over, is just tremendous.

The next morning, my boss—it was a guy by the name of Chuck Tyson, he was from San Diego. Chuck was a tough guy. He was one of the hardest guys I’ve ever worked for. He was just impossible to please; he was a real taskmaster. Kind of fell into that [George] Shultz category a little bit, in a different way. Anyhow, the next morning, he calls a 7 o’clock meeting. You know,
it was a little early, but still, East Coast time. Reagan had a press conference a couple of hours later, we were all up late having a good time and everything obviously, but he had a 7 o’clock meeting. We had then about 50 or 60 advance guys that all were rewarded.

When you get to finish your last campaign stop—I’ll tell you this. I’m going to back up and tell you a little story. My last stop was the Thursday before the election in November of 1980. So it was like the end of October or whatever. It really wasn’t clear up until then that Reagan was going to win this thing. You had a man who was very conservative, from the wacky state of California, former actor, Grade B actor, a lot of people thought he was a warmonger. The women of America, a lot of them didn’t like him because of his stand on abortion. The fact that he was going to start a war with the Soviet Union and send their sons off to war. I mean, there were a lot of issues. Was he electable? We thought he’d be a great President, but could he be electable? Would America send him into office?

So even though we had momentum and [Jimmy] Carter was not in a position of strength, you’re still close. You never want to get, even though we kind of thought—we weren’t even cautiously optimistic, we’ll just keep forging ahead and see what happens. Just keep killing ourselves for the man. It was after the debate in Cleveland. It was the only debate, Carter agreed to one debate. It was the Wednesday night before the election, so that’s very late. Debates now are early on, as you both know. But after that debate it seemed clear that he could win this thing. Because he really had won that debate and proved that he was presidential. Carter was just really weakening and lost control so much. It was just a sad situation with Iran and interest rates, prime was at 21 percent, double-digit unemployment, inflation. Things were just a mess. So it seemed like Reagan might be cruising in.

I had to stop the very next day. They overnighted in Cleveland. I was in Texarkana and I remember I was the first stop the next morning. They flew down there, which was interesting, because I had the Texas group, had the delegate group that I was working with, and Arkansas. I never knew when I was in Texas and when I was in Arkansas. I’m building a big event because it was kind of a two-state event. Had a huge airport room and I remember Deaver calling down that night after the debate.

You may recall—I’m sure you do recall—that Carter had mentioned that he had spoken with his daughter Amy about nuclear proliferation. He’s had to live with this for a long time. Well, Deaver was pretty clever as a communicator, as you know. He called down and said, “Jim, I want as many signs made”—you know when you do these political rallies, you have volunteers who make all these signs—“get as many signs made tonight, tomorrow morning. Just make sure they’re there and say, ‘Amy Carter for Secretary of State.’” The press loved it, they went nuts. I finished that event, I guess around mid-day or so, then we all got to fly into Los Angeles for election night. I got in there on Thursday night and started getting ready for election night.

Going back to that 7 a.m. meeting the next day, 50-plus advance guys in a room, Chuck Tyson had told us, “Look, you’ve all worked hard. He’s won, he’s going to be President. There are going to be a lot of jobs back in Washington. If you want to work in the White House, there are going to be some jobs in the White House. You won’t all get to work in the White House. There
are going to be jobs in agencies. Think about what you want to do. You’re not guaranteed jobs, but in my mind you’ve all earned them.”

He said, “In the meantime, there’s a lot to do, coming up with the presidential transition and the inaugural. We’ve got to get you guys back to Washington if you would like to do this.” Some may have wanted to return to their other jobs or businesses or whatever in various states, but a lot wanted to do it. But it was interesting, he said, “I need two guys to stay in Los Angeles for the next two and a half months during the transition. So put your names on a piece of paper and put down if you want to go to Washington or stay in Los Angeles.”

I started thinking, I thought, **Boy, it would be great to work the White House**. I wanted to get back there, but what did I want to do? It was going to be crazy back there, the inaugural, the transition, and the Reagans were going to be out in California most of the time. Deaver was going to be out there. Chief of Staff, he was going to be interviewing. I thought, *I’m going to put down Los Angeles*. If he wants two guys, maybe I want to be out here, be able to spend more time with the Reagans and more time with the senior staff versus the rat race back in Washington. So I put down L.A. One other guy put down L.A. Two guys out of 50-plus guys put down that they would stay in Los Angeles. And that’s what he needed, two guys.

One of the first things we did, like the next day or the day after—Deaver was calling the shots obviously—he said, “You’ve got to get a place to work out of.” We rented that house right across the street from the Reagans. We approached the family. Of course, they had known the Reagans and everything. I said, “We need a staff headquarters for three months.”

**Knott**: Where is this house?

**Kuhn**: In the Pacific Palisades, on San Onofre Drive, it’s right up from Sunset Boulevard, you work your way up the hills in the Pacific Palisades. And they moved out. We paid them what then seemed like a lot of money, I think it was $5,000 a month, which in 1980 was a lot of money. Moved out for three months, we moved them out, they took all the furniture and we took all these rooms. The dining room became a conference room and all the bedrooms became offices and everything. We worked out of that house every day. Jim Baker would come out, Deaver would come out, Meese would come out. There was all this activity.

It was interesting how it all changed and right away. The White House Communications Agency, which is run by the Army, came out. The Secret Service and the White House Communications Agency did what we did, except they rented the house next to the Reagans. We were across the street. And it was unbelievable. Once again, I grew up on a farm in Ohio, went to Kent, worked in Canton, Ohio. I thought, *This is really something*.

Then the press. The White House detail of the Secret Service came out. Reagan had had Secret Service the whole campaign but now the White House detail started to protect him immediately thereafter. They expanded it and added more people on, since he was President-elect. We had a White House switchboard that was set up right away, so we had phones that said White House on them, with the White House operator tied back to Washington. It worked through the White House Communications Agency.
So just immediately or thereafter, it was almost as if he started to become President. The White House press corps, Sam Donaldson, Leslie Stahl, they were out there staked out in his driveway, or out on the street on a daily basis, it seemed. Every time you went somewhere—we couldn’t go to the barber, the dentist—we had press vehicles in the motorcade. He could have been going to give a speech, he could have been going to the doctor, as I said, barber. I mean, they didn’t go in the barber shop or the dentist, watch him in the chair, but they’d go in the motorcade, just to cover anything that might happen. Really, what that’s called, as I think you know, it’s called the “deathwatch.” Whenever the President goes anywhere, there’s always press in the motorcade.

But it just started to evolve, change overnight when he became President-elect. Every day, this other gentleman and I—and others would come out too, press people come out, staff were rotating in and out then—we were at the house with the Reagans every day. So we got to see him every day, we got to see her. Deaver was out, Baker was out, moving back and forth. They did make three trips back to Washington, when they went back and met with the Carters, met with the transition team back here. When they did that, that gave us a couple of days off out in L.A.

When that was over, Carter sent, traditionally—although Clinton didn’t do it this time—but it had been a tradition, I don’t know going back to when, the outgoing President would send Air Force One to the hometown of the President-elect to pick him up and bring him in. They had sent the primary Air Force One. There were always two as you know, they were the two 707s, tail number 27,000 and 26,000. The 26,000 is at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in the museum, because that’s the plane that brought [John F.] Kennedy’s body back from Texas. LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] was sworn in on that plane.

They brought 27,000 out, the newer edition that Nixon had purchased in ’72 or ’73. That came out with a whole contingent of the White House staff then that had been hired. Some time in December, late December, I had been told that I had a job in the White House advance office, which was outstanding. I had thought that I was going to fly back when the Reagans left that day, I thought I was going to have to get a commercial flight back and go back to Washington. I remember it was January 14th. But they took care of me. I got to fly back on the plane with the Reagans, which was very, very nice. It was just an honor to do that. We came in on January 14th. They stayed at Blair House for five or six nights until the 20th, the day of the inauguration, and then they moved into the White House.

Knott: Jim, can you tell me again what you were doing during this transition period specifically? I mean, were you advancing these small forays where he would leave and go to—?

Kuhn: It was that. It was some work planning ahead for Washington. That’s a good question. I mean it was always, there were a lot of surprises.

Knott: Something that had to be done.

Kuhn: Yes, it was like, “Okay, he’s going to do this and he’s going to do that.” There were some days where you try not to even bother him. We don’t even need to see him today, he’s just going to stay in, leave him alone. But people were calling out there all the time from the transition,
from the inaugural. We needed information from the Reagans, this and this. So we were kind of the go-between. Then he would go places and you would do that. He gave some speeches; you’d do that. She would ask about this, ask about that. You’d have to get her answers. She’d always ask the toughest questions, because a lot of her questions didn’t have any answers. They were just very unorthodox questions.

Knott: Mrs. Reagan?

Kuhn: Yes. So we were just running all the time, see. It was a combination. But it wasn’t just advance work. You’d be in the office doing some things, might even answer some letters or whatever. So it was kind of a cross-section of things. I remember the day the moving van came to move the things back to Washington, it was right before Christmas. This big, brand new truck pulled up. It was Allied Van Lines. The big orange truck that has the one on it, Route US 1. It’s a brand new truck. They brought a new truck out. They brought the driver of the year out and everything, the best crew they had to load the Reagans’ stuff and get them back.

I have to tell you a story about this. Mrs. Reagan had started packing. She was deciding what was going to get packed and she had help there at the house. It seemed like from November 5th on she was planning what was going to go back, she was so busy. He was busy too, but he wasn’t packing. She kept getting after him, “Honey, you’ve got to start deciding what you want packed.” She finally said, “You’ve got to start working with Ronnie. He’s not getting ready to go and the truck’s coming and he’s got to decide. You’ve got to help him, you’ve got to push him.”

It finally got to one afternoon in December. He had a desk in the corner of the bedroom, that big bedroom. He’s sitting there working. Lanny Wiles, my colleague on the advance staff, said, “You know, Governor—” we still called him Governor then—“Governor, you know Mrs. Reagan has all these boxes and everything. You haven’t even started. We’ve got to get busy. Look, what can we do? Let’s start today.” He looked up; he was answering a letter or something. He said, “I don’t want to go.” Then he repeated it. “I don’t want to go.” We asked him what he meant. He said, “I don’t want to leave California.”

I thought to myself, Oh my God, he doesn’t want to be President. He just wanted to see if he could beat him. Reagan knew that he would travel west on Air Force One many times—at least for the next four years. We decided to leave him alone at the time rather than press the issue. Then the next day he started to pack. He finally started getting some things together and he got going and everything, but he just loved California.

In fact, as President, I heard him say this in various speeches—not in policy speeches, political speeches or when he would go off notes or whatever, a dinner audience where he could tell some jokes or something—he’d always talk about California. He would say things, how much he loved going out to the ranch and this and that. But he would say, “California is not a place. It’s a way of life. It’s just different; it’s a different culture out there.” And he’d say funny things, he’d also say, “California is the only place where you can fall asleep under a rose bush and freeze to death.” He’d have the audience rolling in the aisles, just talking about it and everything, but that was basically it through the campaign.
I’ve got to tell you this Lyn Nofziger story. Lyn may have told you this, or maybe you already know it, but Jim Brady got hired on when we beat various people. I guess it’s a good thing I’m saying this because I want to talk a little bit about some of the folks that he did beat in primaries. Aside from [George H. W.] Bush and Howard Baker, and of course there was Bob Dole. There was [Phillip] Crane, there were like eight people running or something.

**Knott:** John Connally I think—

**Kuhn:** That’s the one I want to get to. The one I was concerned most about was John Connally. I thought, I don’t know. I wasn’t too concerned about Bush until we lost in Iowa. And now I’m going to tell you an Iowa story too. You must hear this all the time, when people start talking.

**Knott:** Please, this is great.

**Kuhn:** Let me go to Iowa first, because John Connally falls after. We did three campaign tours in ’79. We went out in October. Actually the first one was, yes, it was late October, early November was our announcement. No, I’m sorry, we did announce. I think our announcement, our kick-off was in New York. I believe it was November 4th or right around there, the day of the election a year later. The thinking was, take Reagan to New York, the place that Reagan is thought not to like, the city that doesn’t know him, that doesn’t like him. Go right into the lion’s den and announce his Presidency.

We did a ten-city tour. We started in New York, went to places like Grand Rapids, all over the country. We ended up in Orlando. I and a group of advance guys did New York, and then two of us swung down and we finished Orlando then. We’d worked on Orlando ahead of time, went back to New York, but then we had to high tail it down there because it took a week, once they finished New York or so, to get down there. So that was tour one. Then there was tour two a couple of weeks later, three weeks later. Then tour three, which was in December.

I did the very last campaign stop in December, the 20th or the 19th of December, which was in a small town in western Iowa. Harlan, Iowa. Some of these places weren’t easy to get to because of course we didn’t have helicopters then and he wasn’t President. The Reagans always had a chartered aircraft. In the primaries they had a 727 stretch. That was a good plane then, they were very proper planes. In the general we had two of them then. But we had to take the campaign plane into Omaha and we had to motorcade 60 miles to get into Harlan, that was the closest airport.

The point I want to make is, I got in there a week ahead of time and I’m just getting berated. Our organization there said, “We’ve got problems.” They said, “Governor Reagan has written off Iowa and George Bush has been living here for weeks, if not months. You got a lot of people who are very upset with your man and we think it could cause problems in caucuses. You’re going to have trouble getting a crowd here at this event.” And that was just the beginning. People were pounding on tables and everything else, “What’s this campaign done? This is a disaster.”

So I went back to Nick Ruwe, the guy who hired me. I said, “Nick, I’m getting my butt kicked all over the place. We’ve got problems.” He said, “Oh, those Iowa people, they beating on you
out there, Jim? They’re complaining to us, too. Don’t worry about those guys.” I said, “Nick, I am worried. I think we’ve got serious problems here, at least in western Iowa.” He said, “Oh Kuhn, we’ve got 65 percent of the vote, it’s a solid 65 percent.” I said, “Nick, I know how you do these polls and everything and the error factor is very minimal, but I’m hearing it first hand everywhere I’m going, and I say we’ve got problems. We’re going to have problems putting this event together. RR’s got some serious erosion here.” He said, “I don’t want to hear it again from you. Do your job.” And I said, “I will.”

You know, we lost. We lost the caucuses and the press went nuts. This guy Ronald Reagan is politically dead, it’s over for Reagan. And Bush is parading around all over the place going, “Big mo, big mo.” What the hell is “Big mo?” What’s he talking about, who’s this guy? That’s how Bush was. He was a dear man, I’ll talk about him later.

I remember, we were just devastated the next day. I ended up in Huntsville, Alabama, the next day and it was cold and snowing. I checked into a Best Western Hotel and the roof was leaking and water was coming down into the room. I turn on the TV and I see Bush getting off his plane. You know how he would run and kind of walk real fast, strutting around going, “Big mo, big mo.” I thought, We have to pick up the pieces here and really go to work for this man. We did and he won big in New Hampshire and we were back on track again.

But Connally did not go, really didn’t do anything. Didn’t even get into Iowa, I don’t believe. If he did he came in third or fourth or something. Had written off New Hampshire, was not even on the ballot in New Hampshire. He was laying all his groundwork for South Carolina. Strom Thurmond was stumping big time for John Connally in South Carolina. So we’ve got a challenge down there. We screwed up in Iowa. We could have won Iowa, that was John Sears who blew it. John Sears blew Iowa, it could have lost him the election. Won New Hampshire. Gerry Carmen had a major, major roll in getting New Hampshire for us. But there were a lot of people involved in that process.

The next step then, I mean there were Florida, Alabama and Georgia, which were going to be key states. Reagan was in a position of strength down there, very conservative states. But there was South Carolina, which was looming large. We spent a lot of time in South Carolina. I remember we were in Florida—South Carolina is always on a Saturday. You may recall John McCain gave that awful speech that Saturday night after he lost to Bush in South Carolina. I remember Reagan, we were in Miami Beach giving a speech at the Eden Roc Hotel the Saturday night of the election. It was clear that we had won and we won early, and that was a major, major defeat for John Connally and a major win for Ronald Reagan. In fact, we left the dinner to go into another room at the Eden Roc Hotel to do a press conference right after it was announced, declared, that Reagan had won.

So we finally knocked Connally down and Connally had nothing going in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia, which was a Tuesday, or ten days later, and Reagan won big down there. Well, the point I wanted to make is, then these candidates would come out—Connally endorsed Reagan. In fact, I did that event, it was at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, where Connally came out and formally endorsed Reagan for President. Then we started to pick up, as things started to build
momentum, we started to grow. Then we started hiring people from other campaigns who were good. We hired Jim Brady from the Connally campaign and others that came in.

The point I want to make about Lyn Nofziger—this is the only story I have on him. If I’m giving you too much detail—

**Knott:** No, no, this is great.

**Kuhn:** If I’m getting off the track, just say, “We don’t need all that, Jim.”

**Knott:** No, no.

**Kuhn:** I met Jim Brady—you start thinking back, where he started to go, Illinois was coming up as a big state, we blitzed Illinois and Texas was coming up. We blitzed Texas big time, because that was a huge Reagan state in ’76. Reagan won all 100 delegates in 1976; President Ford got zero. I met Jim Brady on a flight, on the campaign plane, going between cities in Texas. You may recall or have heard that Jim Brady was very colorful, was always full of jokes, full of humor. Then, of course, the terrible disaster getting shot by [John, Jr.] Hinckley. When I met him he was very quiet, very reserved, new coming on, didn’t want to talk much. He loosened up as time went on.

Lyn—here’s the story—and maybe Lyn told you this and maybe he didn’t. He probably didn’t tell you this, but this was Lyn Nofziger and I think he did the right thing. You may recall Reagan had given a speech at some point way back when, and he would say some bizarre things sometimes. You never quite figured out where he got some of these things. But he talked about taking on the environmentalists. He talked about environmentals this, that. He said, “You know the trees, trees give off pollution, too.” You remember that.

**Knott:** Right.

**Kuhn:** Well, Jim Brady being as clever as he was—I wasn’t on the plane at that time, a lot of times I wasn’t on the plane because I’d get in, do the event, do the stop, city, and get on a commercial flight and go elsewhere and see him five, six, seven days later. They were coming in somewhere, a heavily wooded area. Brady made the mistake of saying, “Look at all those killer trees down there.” Lyn heard him say it and was livid. Threw him off the plane for like two or three days, essentially fired him for three days, suspended him. That was Lyn Nofziger, “we’re not going to have this stuff.” Brady shouldn’t have said it. It was funny when he said it but he got caught.

Let’s see, going back to the primaries, going back to John Connally. Connally endorsed us, others came out. Howard Baker at some point came out and endorsed us, all those folks. What else on the campaign? I’m just thinking. One more John Connally story. This is the kind of stuff you probably don’t need, but I’ve got to tell you because it just contrasted Reagan to other people. We did a stop. We’re now into the fall, September of 1980. Now we have two planes, we have more staff, we have more press. We have one plane devoted to press and press staff. So we’re getting into the big time now, we’re going up against the President now.
The events were getting bigger, meaning we had to have bigger crowds and the demands were bigger on us. A lot of what we did was crowd building. That’s one of the hardest things that you can ever do, because how do you get people to come out? And if you don’t have a big event you’re going to embarrass the Governor. Press are going to say he’s weak, people don’t support him, this and that. I’ll just tell you this quickly and I want to get to Connally. A lot of it wasn’t so much, okay, you had to educate the public, to let them know he’s coming. A lot of folks still would not want to come because, “We’re going to go there, you’ll have all this security, we won’t get in, there’s no place to park, so it’s going to be a hassle.” So you had to build it. You had a real public relations campaign that you had to do to get word out that he was coming, that it was going to be this great event and that was the place to be and that they were going to be treated nicely. They could get there, they could park, they could do this, they could do that.

Then you would have local celebrities or local office holders do press conferences, you do all these things to really build it up and everything. The event I wanted to get to is, we’re going to the East Texas State Fair. I remember the campaign organization, everything was run out of L.A. in the primaries. Well, in the general, everything was run out of Washington, there was just all this stuff evolving. They said, “You’re going to the East Texas State Fair in Tyler, Texas.” I said, “The Texas State Fair is in Dallas.” They said, “No, this is the East Texas State Fair.” I said, “They don’t have two state fairs. Each state has one state fair.” Well, Texas being Texas has two state fairs. This is what you were up against as an advance man. You’d go in and you knew pretty much what you wanted to do, you’d get a broad outline from the political people.

Each state was organized, state-by-state, region. You had a regional coordinator for the south, the southwest. Then you had state coordinators and they decided, “This is what we think Reagan ought to do.” But the advance guys had the final say in how it was going to be done. If we didn’t like it we could veto it. Well, in addition to the state people who were our people on the payroll, the national people, then you’d get there and you’d have your local folks there too, who were the Reagan people, who were the volunteers. Who were very important because they were volunteering and they really knew the area.

The problem was, a lot of times they had their ideas that they conveyed back to national and sold them on, that we could veto or that they disagreed with national and there was a problem. Or you’d get in there, and I remember I went to Tyler and it was a some 10,000-seat stadium that they wanted to take Reagan into. They said, “That’s your event. That’s the event site.” I thought, Boy, it’s going to be in the middle of the day, September, it’s hot in Texas. I don’t want any empty seats. I’ve got to get out of the stadium, I don’t like it.

You want to come into a small room and pack it. You want the walls busting down, as you know, you want the roof coming off with people. Not some 10,000-seat stadium—and not that I couldn’t have filled it, but what if you only had 5,000 people, what if you only had 7,000 people, and the press starts cameras panning and it’s not a roaring success. So you’ve got to do your stealth work, you’ve got to start scouting around and find another event site. Well, there was this big exhibit hall on the state fairgrounds. I thought, Boy, I could put 2,000 people in here and it would look great, but I could jam 5,000 in here and it would look outstanding. The problem was, they had some auto show in there as part of the state fair. I’ve got to sell the people here that
we’re not doing the stadium, and then I’ve got to sell them that’s it’s got to be here and I’ve got to get somebody to move that damn car show out of there.

Fortunately, we were able to do all of that and we had a great event. Connally was with the Reagans. We did a cattle-judging contest. Reagan is looking at the cattle, he’s handing out ribbons. We’ve got the press there, Connally’s there. Then we’re walking up and down the midway, tons of people, shaking hands, great footage, great photos. Then we do the big speech, and we had 7,000 people in there. The problem was John Connally—and I had no idea, but too bad—we knew what the Reagans could handle. Connally couldn’t handle heat very well and he broke into a big sweat. I mean, he sweat through his suit, his shirt, dripping all over. The Reagans weren’t sweating a drop. We got in, we did the cattle judging, we did the midway, it seemed like it took us half an hour working the midway. Great stuff, a lot of interaction with people.

We got in the hall and it was really hot. We got in to the holding room at the exhibit hall, which is nice and air conditioned, and Connally grabbed me by the arm and started swearing at me, screaming at me. The Reagans were in another room; we were in another holding room, I guess. He said, “What the hell are you trying to do? Look at me, what kind of an advance man are you?” That was a great stop.

Now, Ronald Reagan could have had scratches, blood, ripped coat, and would never have said a word. Would never have complained, would never have sworn, would never have yelled. He would have just done it and said, “That’s okay,” and John Connally just ripped my neck off. But that’s the difference between the two. John Connally—and unfortunately so many politicians, I mean they’re one way on stage and they’re another way backstage. They’re another way in the limo, they’re another way in their office. Reagan was the same everywhere he went. Never changed.

Knott: In other words, there was never an instance where he might have complained about something.

Kuhn: There’s only one way you could really upset—I’ll tell you something, if you made Ronald Reagan angry, you had to be pretty stupid. Or you were bold enough to, for whatever reason, or crazy enough, to say something bad about Nancy Reagan. If you said something about her, if you were negative about her, if you hurt her in some way verbally, that would have done it. Well, (a), most people were afraid of Nancy Reagan, and (b), nobody was going to take on the First Lady. Now, you could talk to her and say, “Mrs. Reagan, I disagree. I think we ought to do this instead of that” or whatever, but why would you do that? Well, you wouldn’t do it. But that was really the only way you could upset Ronald Reagan.

If he ran behind schedule he would get upset. I’ve got to tell you something, it was hard, it was a high honor to work for him, nicest man in the world to be around. Seven days a week for the last four years, Camp David, I ended up going up there 91 weekends with him, and that’s just something you kind of never lost track of. But the hard part, it’s hard to keep the President of the United States on schedule. It’s very difficult to do that, to accomplish what you need to
accomplish and keep him on schedule. He wanted to stay on the schedule because he couldn’t stand to keep people waiting. He didn’t want to inconvenience anyone.

I’m not taking a shot at [William J.] Clinton, but I know that Clinton ran late all the time. He’d run an hour late; he’d run two hours late. He didn’t care. He thought, I’ve got to do what I’ve got to do and I’m the President. While Reagan said, “I can do what I have to do and I can stay on schedule. This is the way I want it done,” because he cared about people that much. We had to change this, and I don’t know how they did it in the first term, but when we did Rose Garden events—and I don’t want to get off the campaign now, I’ll just make this point and get back to the campaign and wrap up. There could have been 200-250 people. One time we had 300 people in the Rose Garden when we did the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday bill signing ceremony. They start bringing 300 people in the Rose Garden 15 minutes ahead of time, 20 minutes ahead of time, whatever, maybe half an hour ahead of time. And Reagan is looking out there and he’s pacing. He needs to get this done by this time, we’re falling behind, his paperwork.

I said, “You want to go out there, don’t you?” He said, “Yes, look at them, they’re all waiting for me.” I said, “Fine. You can’t go out until the press is ready, until everything is set.” We finally had to tell these various offices in the White House, it could have been legislative affairs, it could have been public liaison, it could have been policy, we said, “You bring people into the Rose Garden five minutes ahead of time and that’s that. Because the President sees them and he wants to go out and be with them because he can’t stand to have people waiting for him. Then he gets upset. Then we get off track,” and then he and I would have our little things. We would disagree and sometimes, you spend that much time with somebody, it’s not working. Because he had such a big heart, he just didn’t like to put people out.

Going back to the campaign. Lyn Nofziger, Ed Meese, Mike Deaver, they were all there with him in Sacramento, and Marty Anderson. Then there were the rest of us who came on later on. I found this out, didn’t know it in the campaign but I found out later how important she was. The person that was the most important other than Ronald Reagan was Nancy Reagan. We couldn’t have made it without her. Ronald Reagan would not have been nearly as successful as he was without her. Even though she wasn’t a policy person, she knew what was going on. She was his ultimate protector. She had a major role in getting him to engage the Soviet Union. She was the one who worked on him the most, to open up his mind. You recall in 1983 he gave that speech in Florida and called them the “Evil Empire.” But she thought, He’s got to do this and he’s the one to do it and the time to do it is now. So she really had to open up his mind.

But she watched everything. Dave Fischer told me, when I took the job in the second term, and Lyn Nofziger had mentioned this too, and Deaver, they all had given me certain things on how I was going to have to deal with Nancy Reagan. I remember them saying, “She’s going to call you. She’s going to call you a lot and she’s going to ask you a lot of questions. Of course you’re going to take those calls, but you’re going to be doing other things, but you’ve got to deal with the First Lady.” I never knew. The phone would ring, it would be the White House line, I’d see it flashing, I’d hear it ring, and the President’s secretary would answer it. I thought, Boy, could that be the First Lady?
Then it might be four, she calls at 4:30 in the afternoon, she generally wasn’t calling to say, “Jim, I just want to let you know you’re doing a good job today.” There was something wrong that she saw. She could have seen it on CNN or the news or—and she’d say, “What are you guys doing? Why did you do this? Why did you let him say that or do this? Why did he get pinned down here by the press,” or whatever. A lot of times I’d get so driven by the day or the policy, where she had to stop people—and she’d do this with everyone, the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, where she would stop people in their tracks. “Why is Ronnie giving this speech? Why is he going this way in his policy? Why is he even getting involved in this?” And I couldn’t answer. I’d go, “You’re right.” And I would have to modify my course. She was always looking ahead, always watching everything, protecting him and pushing things the way things needed to be pushed.

Don Regan was very good, I think he tried hard, he worked hard as Chief of Staff. I want to go back to the campaign, I’m getting into the White House. I’m trying to think if there’s anything else. Do you have any other questions on the campaign?

**Knott:** No, I think, unless you can think of something—

**Kuhn:** I may come back to it.

**Knott:** We can move to the White House advance office.

**Kuhn:** Going into the White House advance office, I have to tell you—

**Knott:** Must have made your job a lot easier at that point, I mean, to have all the resources of the—

**Kuhn:** It was unbelievable. I remember, going back to the transition, when they had decided that the plane was coming out to pick up the Reagans, I got a call from one of President Carter’s military aides. You know, they have military aides from each branch of the service. We expanded it out to include the Coast Guard.

President Carter’s Army aide called me, his name is Jose Muratti, he was President Carter’s Army aide. He said, “You know we’re sending the plane out.” You had WHCA out, the White House Communications Agency, see what they do. He said, “We’ll send other logistical support out to help you that day.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, you’ve been on the campaign. I’ve heard what you’ve done; I know what advance guys do. Whenever you moved and overnighted, didn’t you have to get volunteers to get a truck and do baggage and everything?”

And we did, and that was always a part that we didn’t want to deal with. It was a small part, but I’ve got to tell you something, when they came in, there was a lot of baggage, there was press equipment. When you’ve got people there to do it for you and they had to get some big U-Haul truck to do it—he said, “There’s going to be a baggage call. We’ll do all that for you. You won’t have to get anybody to do that anymore.” I said, “The military does that? You do that? Send them out, sounds great.”
Tell you another quick story here. On that stop in New York, that first stop where they kicked it off, I’ll tell you two things. Nick Ruwe had told us, he said, “If you can” —we did an overnight in New York and I forget where they went to the next day—but he said, “If you can, when you leave the Waldorf Astoria with the motorcade, it might be good if you left a couple of staff behind.” Nick was always so clever, I wasn’t always sure he was sober. He was older, he was wiser. I said, “Nick, did I hear you right?” He said, “Yeah, you heard me right Kuhn. Let me tell you something. If you leave people on the first stop it’ll never happen again.”

I thought, I really don’t want to leave anybody behind, but I see his thinking. Well, we didn’t leave anybody behind, but we did—no, I actually got it mixed up. New York was not an overnight. It was another overnight that we did later on that he said to do that on. No, New York was not an overnight.

I’ll tell you the other story, it was another overnight early on that he said to do that on. What did happen that night was we left after the dinner and had to go to the airport. It was like 11 o’clock at night, and we went out to La Guardia and then flew to another city. I guess flew down to Washington, then overnighted in Washington that night. When the baggage went to the airport and everything, everything was fine except Mrs. Reagan’s personal bag. The bag that I didn’t realize how important it was, wherever we went, that bag had to be with her, somehow got left behind, got separated from her. So we got off to a real bad start. That was very bad.

Anyhow, I wanted to tell you about Nick Ruwe saying leave someone, that was the train of thought. I think one time we did almost leave someone, and it was inadvertent and we didn’t. But anyhow, going back to the White House.

When we got there it was really strange because we went through the inaugural, I got there on the 14th with the Reagans, started working on the inaugural, the transition, the this, the that. The swearing in that day. Then the President always goes in and has lunch with the congressional leadership in Statuary Hall. Then he gets in the motorcade and does the inaugural parade and then goes to the reviewing stand and watches the rest of the parade. Well, my boss then was a gentleman by the name of Steve Studdert. The advance guys were spread out all over Washington. He and I were there at the Capitol, we were the last two there at the Capitol. We were trying to set up the photo of the Reagans coming down the stairs of the Capitol for the press and this and that.

We did that and they got in the car and the motorcade went out, the parade motorcade went out very slowly with Reagan in the lead. We looked at one another and we had to get down to the White House and we thought, How are we going to get down to the White House? There are no cabs, and I don’t even know what the deal with the subways was then, we weren’t even big on the subways. We’ve got to get down there right away because we’ve got to get down ahead. This is how advance guys think—and I didn’t think of it, my boss did. He was very clever. He saw Howard Baker’s car, who was the new majority leader of the United States Senate, going, and it was empty. But it had the signs on the car, “Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr., Majority Leader, United States Senate.” And he’s looking at me and I’m looking at him and I thought, You can’t. He was a wild man.
We knew then that Baker was inside, that the Senate was going into session if you recall, to confirm Al Haig and Cap Weinberger, to get them done right away, so they could go to work. I knew what he was thinking. I said, “No, Steve, we’re not getting in that car.” And he said, “Yes, we are.” So we got in Baker’s car; it was a military driver. He looked at us and he didn’t say anything. We’re riding on the motorcade route and these people recognized us, you could hear them yelling your name, “Hey, Jim, what are you doing in that car?” I said to Steve Studdert, “Steve, we’ve got to pull these signs off,” they were metallic signs. So we reached up, took the signs off the car, pulled them in. We’re riding in the motorcade down to the reviewing stage, getting treated like royalty.

The next day—and we went through the balls that night and each of us was assigned the various balls that the Reagans went to. We went to work in the White House and the advance office is in the Old Executive Office Building, now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. It was a weird feeling because we got there, and all this security that you hadn’t seen before, all this paperwork that we had to fill out, stacks and stacks of it. They took us down into the basement, which looks like a dungeon down there, and started fingerprinting us and everything. I thought, God, this is really weird. But then on top of all that, the Reagans were doing things.

What advance guys do, we got involved in major events in the White House, the planning and putting them together, the media coverage, and to make sure it was presidential and to get the message out and get value out of them. You do major events at the White House, could have been in the Rose Garden, could have been in the East Room, could have been the State Dining Room, could have been in hotels in Washington, but then in cities around the country and countries around the world. And that’s what I did for the next four years.

I have to tell you something, I had a really weird feeling about going into the White House because I actually was nervous about going in there to work every day. It was such an adjustment, thinking, I’m not sure I can do this.

Knott: Yes.

Kuhn: I was nervous at night going to sleep, nervous in the morning going in. It took me a couple of months to really settle down, because it was the White House. Some kid from the farm, I thought, I’m not so sure I’m cut out to do this. The responsibility and the work with the President. I finally just told myself, Do what Reagan does. Just relax, be comfortable and be self-confident and work hard. It was never a fun place to work because the work was so difficult, there was so much pressure, the deadlines were so severe. But it’s the most fulfilling thing you can ever do in your life. As I said before, it’s just a high honor to do it.

Knott: What would your typical day be, or did they vary?

Kuhn: Yes, you never knew. I’ll give an example. When he went to Colombia in 1982, he went in early December. When you did an overseas trip you would go down ahead of time for what was called the survey. Then there was a pre-advance. A survey was just a very small group. In fact, I’ll give you an example here. It was not real easy to fly around South America back in the
early ’80s. I mean, you could do it, but it’s not like today, because American established all those
routes down there. You’re on different carriers to get around. We went to various countries—we
went to Brazil, we went to Colombia, we went to Costa Rica, Honduras. Where else? A couple
other places down there.

Well, the advance guys would go down ahead of time to various countries. I didn’t go to all those
countries; I went to Costa Rica, Honduras, and Colombia. We had to decide where we would
take the President. He was going to meet with the head of state, the Prime Minister, head of
government. But then what else was he going to do and more importantly where was he going to
go, other cities? Well you go to these cities, kind of check them out from a White House
standpoint, and say, “What would work for us and what wouldn’t work?” So when the
ambassador is talking to the foreign minister or whoever he’s communicating with in the host
government, he can say, “Well, it’s the White House’s preference or our preference to go to
Bogota but we don’t want to go to—” I can’t even remember to give you a specific example, it
was a presidential retreat at a coastal city. If you said the name of it I’d think of it, but I can’t
think of it now, where the Prime Minister would go. Or the President, he was the head of state,
Belisario Betancourt. But it was too resortish, I thought, Why take Reagan there? They’ll take
shots at the beach and everything. Let’s just go to Bogota.

But on a survey trip we would hop around to these cities and then we would look at event sites.
We knew what would work and what wouldn’t work for us, but we didn’t have ultimate say
because the country did. But then through diplomacy we’d kind of work out, “We really would
prefer not to do this” or “We’d really like to do this,” and there were some givens that we knew
we just absolutely had to do. We were going to the presidential palace and things like that. Well,
we’d do that on the survey trip. Deaver would come down. We’d be down ahead of him and we
could eliminate half the stuff that Deaver didn’t even need to see, because we knew we couldn’t
do it, that it wouldn’t work.

We might be gone for a week doing that. As I said, it wasn’t easy to fly around commercially
then, that many years ago. About a month later or so, the survey team would go out, where a
bigger group would come out. You’d have a Secret Service contingent, White House
Communications Agency, people from the State Department, White House staff, and they would
look at the things that Deaver decided to do. The advance guy for that particular country would
be there, because you’re going to end up leading that whole entourage once it starts.

This could be, to give you an example, we started doing the survey for Normandy, for France,
we did the survey in February. We did the pre-advance I think in late March, early April. Then
Normandy was on June 6th. I got there three weeks ahead of time. That was such a big deal,
going to Normandy and what we did for the 40th anniversary of D-Day, we ended up working on
that for months and months, five, six months ahead of time. You end up going there, then, when
the advance teams actually are gone three weeks ahead of time, going back to Colombia. You’re
there over Thanksgiving because it’s early December. It’s a difficult trip because our
relationships were so-so with the Colombians. The Colombians and other countries then kind of
saw the United States as this colossus of the north and we were trying to enhance the rapport.
There are a lot of demonstrators, there were major security issues in Bogota. The altitude down
there was 10,000 feet.
But you’re the White House, you’re the President’s representative, working with the host government. So you’re going to the presidential palace every other day for meetings, trying to work out the details, what the President will do, the schedule. You’re leading the whole advance team, which consists of Secret Service, military support, communications, Air Force One, helicopter, Marine One, State Department, embassy. So you end up heading up a group of a couple hundred people in the end. That was such a difficult trip and then in the end, I think if we had to do it over again, we wouldn’t have gone. Because in the speech that Betancourt gave that day, I mean, he really lambasted the United States, took some shots at Reagan. It was not good. The press wrote major stories about him, just a difficult trip across the board.

Now, to answer the ultimate question, what were my hours like? To give you an example of how bad it was, I remember, I didn’t eat for two days. So many things had to be done, so many problems, so many changes. Colombians being so difficult, where all of a sudden it’s the end of the day and you didn’t even stop to eat and everything’s closed. We were staying at the Hilton hotel in downtown Bogota, nothing there. So you figure, lose some weight. Well, went through the next day and did it again. Wow, I got so weak I thought I was going to pass out. I finally found something to eat, but that’s how difficult it could be when you’re out there doing this.

Growing up on the farm was very hard. Long hours, cold weather, machinery that broke. You get hurt, or the animals, you get sick, all those problems. That was a great way to grow up because it taught you how to work, but I think the advance work was the hardest work I’ve ever done. You’re trying to eliminate all the surprises. It’s not easy to take a President into any city, into any setting, into any city—let alone another country—and try to make it work the way you want it to work. So that you can carve out the schedule, you can do exactly what the schedule says it is going to do, there were always changes. We call that “getting rolled,” last minute changes, surprises. Trying to get good press events. Trying to bolster the rapport between the countries. It was tough, it was tough. Like I say, we came out of Colombia knowing that if we had to do it over again, we probably wouldn’t have gone. But a lot of that was just because of the relationship between the United States and Colombia.

You could go to Chicago—I want to go back to the campaign here, this is a good campaign story. If you don’t mind me doing this—

**Knott:** Could we just take a quick break?

**Kuhn:** Yes.

**[BREAK]**

**Kuhn:** You heard about Chicago and Cook County politics, I mean, you read about it in political science books. The [Richard J.] Daley machine and everything. If I could jump back to the campaign, late October, mid-October, I guess, of 1980, sent us to Chicago. I mean, you just never knew where you were going to go next. In the primaries, I had summer clothes because
you could be in Miami or it could be in New Hampshire. You went where the states were and some of these states were just kind of on top of one another, so you’re just hopping all over the place. But this is the general now and we got sent into Chicago. They said, “We want to go into an ethnic neighborhood where there are family stores, strong Polish area, the meat store, the shoe repair store, the this store, the that store.” These are family-run stores for many, many decades. “Go in there and see what you can work out.”

I thought, Boy, we could build a nice crowd here. We could have him go into various stores and buy some things, get some good photos, some good footage and walk rope lines and then have him speak. You know, walk down the middle of the street, rope it off and have him speak somewhere. That was coming together nicely, but, you know, when you’re there, you build resistance too, at the same time. A lot of times it was always demonstrators, but in this case it was the Democrats. I got this sense, about the fifth day, something started—the people that seemed real enthusiastic about us coming into their stores weren’t quite as enthusiastic. But I still didn’t think anything was really wrong. I just thought, well, they’re busy and we distracted them all this time and everything.

We’re building the event, thought we’d have a big crowd. The day before, a couple of store owners that we were going in told us that they love Ronald Reagan but they thought maybe it would be best if he didn’t come into their store. Another one said, he was even more specific, he said, “I don’t know if Ronald Reagan should speak in front of my store,” because we were going to set the platform up and the podium in the center of the block and everything. I said, “What’s going on here? I sensed something a couple of days ago.” And he said, “Our party leaders on the other side have come through and they threatened us and said that if we allow Ronald Reagan to come into our stores, and especially me, if I allow Reagan to come in and speak in front of my store that there will be certain things that won’t happen the way they used to happen.” Like trash won’t always be picked up, snow won’t always be removed. Maybe snow will be put in front of his store rather than being taken elsewhere. Who knows what else they threatened him with? I thought, my God, this is what I read about. This stuff really goes on? I couldn’t believe it. This is kind of scary.

I called Deaver and I said, “This is serious, Mike, this stuff still goes on apparently.” And I said, “I sensed something a couple of days ago.” He said, “Can you salvage the event?” I said, “I don’t know. Reagan would never want to do this.” He said, “No, no, no, what if we just came and didn’t go into the stores. We canceled the remarks. Can you still get a crowd there, can you still have him with people?” I said, “Yeah, if we just walked down the street” —I came up with a different scenario— “we don’t go into those stores, we stay off their property, we don’t put them in sensitive awkward positions like this, where these ward leaders are going to come after them later. I think we’ll be okay. Let me check that out in the morning.” And they said that would take all the pressure off of them. So we didn’t speak, we didn’t go into the stores, we had a big crowd and we had Reagan just walking in the middle of the street, going this side, that side. It was good stuff. But I didn’t like that.

Knott: Sure.
**Kuhn:** I had just a bad feeling and I’ll never forget it. Going back to—this will give you an example what we had to deal with. In the advance office, 1984, campaign year. The campaign in a sense, in a non-spoken sense, begins with the State of the Union in the re-election year. We knew that and Deaver knew that. So we needed a big event the next day and we did it in Atlanta. We had the Omni down there and we filled the coliseum and it was a great event. But then things unfold that year.

The President does a lot of official events, like he went to Normandy that year, he did the Olympics that year. I got to do Normandy, fortunately. When I say you were the lead advance man, I got to do that. They said, “Do you want to do the Olympics or the convention?” And I said, “I want to do the Olympics.” We hadn’t had Olympics here in 52 years. You couldn’t do everything because you can only be in so many places. That year we had done the Olympics. He did the opening ceremonies. He did an event with the Olympic medallists after the fact, near the closing of the Olympics, because they were up at the ranch during the August time frame. Then I left L.A. and handed that part off, the closing part of it with the medallists to somebody else, because they sent me into Cincinnati.

This is, I guess, I think if I have this right, we had the Olympics in late July, early August, then we had the convention in mid-August. This was a few days before the convention in Dallas, he sent me into Cincinnati. We wanted a big rally and we wanted an official there also. Well, Proctor & Gamble had a new world headquarters under construction that was about, I don’t know, 80 percent complete. Enough where you could go in and say, “Hey, this is an example of the Reagan economy, the Reagan tax break taking hold. Construction, more jobs, large corporations doing very well, hiring more people, going more places, expanding globally, taking them to this new headquarters under construction.” It was huge. So we did that and then we did the political event.

Have you been to Cincinnati?

**Knott:** Once or twice.

**Kuhn:** There used to be a show called *WKRP in Cincinnati* where they had that fountain, it’s called Fountain Square. Well, here’s another quick one. I did a stop there with Reagan in the ’80 campaign in the primaries, for the Ohio primary. This fountain makes a lot of noise, there’s a lot of water, it comes down, I don’t know how many tiers. Candidate Reagan couldn’t get the thing turned off. When the President went in there, I didn’t even have to ask. It was just done, they turned it off. It’s just amazing.

We started building a huge event. I mean, it was really coming together nicely. One of our co-chairs for Ohio is the now sitting Governor of Ohio, Bob Taft II. He was our number one point person and the most senior person on the ground from a political local standpoint. Kind of an unorthodox guy, but you dealt with all kinds of people. I mean, we used to go into some of these cities and you’d have somebody really strong, and then you’d have somebody who might not be so strong. You’d call somebody that you knew, it could have been the state chairman, the political—if you knew somebody really well you’d call and say, “Hey, we’ve got to bolster the situation. We’re going to be in Tampa and we’ve got to make some changes here, we’re going to
need some more support.” This was somebody I knew really well; it was Reagan’s political state chairman in ’76, ’80, and ’84 campaigns. He said, “Jim, that’s the best we have in that area of the state.” And I said, “You’ve got nobody else you can send in for us?” He said, “No, that’s it.” I said, “Fine, we’ll shape him up.”

So you had to work with what you had and you always had to make it look like everything that was going on was their show. Even though we had a lot on our backs, the President coming in and everything had to be the way we wanted it. We had to be like Ronald Reagan. You’re not arrogant, you’re not the big boss. They’re the boss. Yet you’ve got to call the shots without making it look—there was just kind of an art form that you had to—not easily done.

But going back to Cincinnati, these were just some of the things you came up against, it was really strange. In a conservative town, a lot of support, I would have expected this in Cleveland but not Cincinnati. The day before, about 30-36 hours before, I started getting calls from various groups that said they were coming to demonstrate, which was unusual because the Secret Service always has one guy assigned to intelligence to watch out for this kind of stuff, threats, demonstrators, violence. Usually they were good about sharing this information with us, they would tell us right away. I went to them and said, “You guys, why aren’t you talking to us about this?” We had all these meetings and everything. They said, “About what?” And I said, “I’m getting calls from groups that want to come out and demonstrate.” They had nothing, they had zero.

Then I started to get a couple more calls. I was getting like four calls, somebody protesting against the Central American policy, there was a gay group that was going to perform some wedding there at the square. Somebody else upset about—it was mostly Central America and it was mostly his stance on gays. Maybe it was homeless or something, said he wasn’t doing enough there. Ended up getting calls from four different groups. I thought, God, I would never have expected this in Cincinnati. Plus they started calling in onto the White House switchboard. Normally we protected that number, that number got out somehow. I thought, Boy, this could ruin our event.

This is where the Reagans deserve a lot of credit. They really branched out. They brought in the best people they could. They made sure that everybody that ever worked for them got jobs if they wanted jobs. If you deserved a job, you were taken care of. That’s why Lyn Nofziger stayed at the White House for one year. Lyn was there to make sure that the Reagan supporters—especially the conservatives—got placed. Because he didn’t want Jim Baker coming in and bringing in all his people and having Reagan’s people that had been with him for decades getting pushed aside. I don’t know if Lyn talked about this, but Lyn and Jim Baker did not get along at all.

Knott: He made that clear.

Kuhn: And most people would never take on the Chief of Staff of the White House. Lyn would take him on any minute of the day, any day of the week.
But going back to Cincinnati. So we get the Secret Service involved. They weren’t picking up much. I called my boss, who was an old—and here’s my point. He was an old Nixon guy. They brought on people who worked for Nixon because positions opened up and other people were where they needed to be, and they were very good, so why not? And he was very good. Well, the Nixon guys were really tough. They’d go into some of these cities when Nixon was President and they’d have outstanding events, the best events in the world. But they couldn’t go back because they roughed up the local people so bad, there were dead bodies all over the place. They weren’t welcomed back. The Reagan guys could almost always, always go back. It’s just a different style.

I called, his name was Bill Henkel. It was a Sunday, and they were coming in the next day. It’s now late Sunday afternoon and I don’t know what to do. So I call Henkel, and I know they’re on Air Force One. You know where the President is. They just left Columbia, Missouri; they’re at the state fair in Missouri. I called, “Bill.” He said, “How’s it going there?” I said, “It’s coming together nicely but I’ve got to talk to you. I’ve got to talk to you from a land line.” He said, “What is it?” I said, “Bill, I’ve got to talk to you from a land line,” because he’s on Air Force One. He said, “Okay.”

Well, as soon as he got off Air Force One—most people didn’t get on Marine One, that’s just a small group—but they’d get into White House cars and they take them back to the White House. I said, “When you get to Andrews Air Force Base you’ve got to call me.” He knew something was wrong. He called later and said, “What is it, what is it?” I said, “It looks like we have big demonstrations coming tomorrow.” He said, “What did Secret Service tell you?” I said, “That’s the strange thing, they don’t know anything. I’ve got groups calling me, Bill, I’ve had four calls. I’ve never had this happen before.”

“What are you going to do about it?” he said. “What are they going to do, what are they upset about?” I said, “Well, I do have a thought. We’ve done this before, I think we’ve all done it. And I’ve got a great group here. This thing is really buttoned down and organized. We own the event on the square. We signed the lease, we signed the permit. I think we even had to pay something. So this is a political event, it’s declared political, we own it. I told everybody on the stage that.” I’ve got another story to tell you about Cincinnati, if I could tell you these things. If not, stop me.

But I said, “We control the event.” There are magnetometers obviously set up. I said, “I’ve got enough volunteers. We could stop every pro-Reagan sign and every anti-Reagan sign from coming in. Saying, no signs, that they have to leave them at the magnetometers.” He said, “Secret Service, uniform division of Secret Service won’t do that.” I said, “No, I’ve got enough volunteers. This thing is really buttoned down. I think we could pull that off. Bill, at the same time, we’ve got stacks and stacks and stacks of signs already made that we can have inside the event that we’ll pass out to people when they come in.” He said, “Do it, do it. That sounds great.”

Well we planned that whole thing out that night about how it would be done and how we were going to beat these guys one way or another. It worked too well. Our volunteers, actually there were a couple of fights that broke out with the demonstrators at the magnetometers trying to take their signs away, and it got bloody. Nobody badly hurt, but just fisticuffs. I thought, My God, I
didn’t think it would come to that. I didn’t even know about it until after the event because I went out to the airport. We motorcaded in, the airport’s actually in Kentucky. We didn’t have the helicopters on that trip. We went to that Proctor & Gamble’s headquarters, then we got to the main event.

Got there, there were over 20,000 people in Fountain Square. Color signs, bands, everything. I mean, a beautiful sunny day. I could feel Fountain Square. You could feel it shaking, you could actually feel it moving, vibrating. It was just unbelievable. So I don’t know that there are any problems. I see all these Reagan signs, don’t see any demonstrators. Reagan leaves, motorcade back to the airport. I come in and our organization says, “You know, we had some problems with the demonstrators.” All of a sudden press calls are coming in on the hotel lines because White House switchboard had been shut down at that point, or it was going to shut down. I guess it just shut down.

We were getting press calls about what we did to stop demonstrators. I’m finding out more and more and more. Plus, I’ve got to get to the airport because I’m flying out to Los Angeles then to get ready for the campaign kick-off on Labor Day. I had a flight I had to catch, but I thought, What happened here, and is this going to become a big story? Well it did. The Cincinnati Inquirer had front page headline above the fold the next day about how we stopped demonstrators and how we took their signs away, denied them their First Amendment rights, freedom of speech, how they got bloodied up through these Reagan bullies, my volunteers. I didn’t think they were going to—I never thought it would come to this. Larry Speakes had press questions for two days. I mean it was the dominant thing for two days in the White House press room, about how we stopped demonstrators and how we took their signs away, denied them their First Amendment rights, freedom of speech, how they got bloodied up through these Reagan bullies, my volunteers. I didn’t think they were going to—I never thought it would come to this. Larry Speakes had press questions for two days. I mean it was the dominant thing for two days in the White House press room, about what Jim Kuhn and these—so this thing really got out of control.

Then it ended up with the Ohio Civil Liberties Union coming in, filing a lawsuit against me, the Reagan organization in Ohio, and they named a couple of other people. I think they named the Secret Service also in this lawsuit. Then I got called in and I was upset and we had a meeting then. I was supposed to go somewhere else, I forget. This was a couple weeks later and after I heard that I got sued, I was very upset. I said, “I’m not paying one nickel, one dime for a lawyer. I’m not going to do this.” He said, “You don’t have to. The Justice Department is going to defend you.” The reason they could do that was because I stayed on the White House payroll. Most of the White House advance guys had moved over to the campaign. Henkel kept two guys back at the White House and I was one of them.

So then this lawsuit ensued. Things kind of died down press-wise, but I couldn’t go back to Ohio anymore. That’s my home state and I couldn’t even go back to Ohio. If I wanted to see my mother or something I could, but I couldn’t do any campaign stops there. They said, “Stay the hell out of Ohio; you’re not going there any more.” This lawsuit was thrown out by a federal judge, a district judge in Cincinnati. It was appealed. Then went into discovery. Four years later when I’m in the West Wing I was deposed for two days over that. Four years later, 1988. [Angela] Bay Buchanan, Pat Buchanan’s sister, who was our treasurer for both campaigns, called me and said, “You need to do this.” I said, “Bay, can’t we just settle with them. Just work it out. Let’s not drag this thing out.” She said, “No, we can’t do that, we can’t give into them.” You know how the Buchanans are, they’re going to fight this thing. And I thought about it and I
thought, *Oh God, they'll think I'm a wimp*. So I had to go through two days of depositions just over what happened to those signs to stop people from coming out.

One other quick story about—we had a great event, but it got washed out. It really got washed up because of that. I actually went to, Bob Dole had an advance seminar that I spoke at in 1996. They had old Reagan guys there who had done a lot of stops so that we could kind of educate the new guys coming in to do it for Dole. You’ve got to do that when you’re young, you’ve got to do that when you’re in your 20s or 30s because it just burns you out so fast. Somebody there had asked about, what do you do for demonstrators? We had heard that there’s this thing, this policy that you guys follow. The coordinator said, “Well, I don’t think you’ll want to do that, and Jim Kuhn’s here and will tell you why.” And I just explained to them very briefly, I said, “Can’t do it, don’t ever do it. We were wrong and we paid a dear price for it.”

I’ll give you another crazy example how you can get in trouble on these advance stops. There was a football player who played for the Cincinnati Bengals who later was a kind of a celebrity down there, who later became a color analyst for NBC. His name was Bob Trumpy.

**Knott:** Yes, sure.

**Kuhn:** We tried to get as many big name people into this. You want them on stage and you do these press conferences during which you say, “Pete Rose is going to be there, Bob Trumpy is going to be there, the this, the that,” to try to intrigue people, to get them out. Pete Rose had just been traded. They had worked out a deal that week where he was playing up in Montreal, I think. They made a deal to bring him back as the player manager in Cincinnati and let him finish out his career in Cincinnati. When I heard that I thought, *Man, he’s got to be at our event.*

We had to tell all these people, whenever we invited them to a political rally, that it is 100 percent political. Even though it’s the President of the United States, if you are sitting on that stage, you will be perceived by everybody there, the media, it will be written that you are supporting Ronald Reagan, President Reagan, the candidate, against [Walter] Fritz Mondale. You need to know that. Well, I never did get to talk to Pete Rose directly, but I did get to talk to the owner of the Cincinnati Reds, I met with him. That was the Williams family who owned it before Marge Schott took over. I said, “Can we get Pete there?” He said, “I’ll be glad,” he said, “I’d love to get Pete there.”

But I said, “He may say no. Is Pete a Republican or Democrat?” Nobody knew. I kind of thought that Pete might not—just knowing what I knew about Rose. Rose said no. He said, “I have too many Democratic friends. I can’t go to that, they’ll be upset.” Well, we didn’t get that but we did have Reagan call Pete from Air Force One when it was on final approach or halfway or whatever, he called him from Air Force One to welcome him back to Cincinnati. Of course, we released that back to the press that he did that. You know, anything that we can. It was a nice thing for the President to do and you want that to get communicated.

Well, in building that whole thing, Bob Taft was kind of a quirky guy. Not a lot of people—and this is the Governor I’m talking about now, who was just re-elected. He’s into his fifth year as Governor of Ohio, today, as we speak. And the Taft family, you know, being an icon in Ohio
going back to President [William Howard] Taft and Senators, a long list of great political successes. Bob Taft II was kind of weird. I remember when I worked for the mayor of Cleveland, it was my first job when I got out of Kent, going up against John Glenn. A story, he was running for the state Senate. This is 1974 in Ohio, and the story got out that he was not a registered voter. Now here’s a member of the Taft family, not registered, running for office. I thought, How can anybody be that dumb, or that weird?

Well, this guy is kind of quirky, he’s kind of colorless. He didn’t communicate very well and he’s just kind of unorthodox. Just kind of a secluded type of guy. Yet, wanted to be there and wanted to introduce the President. But he did deliver good people, he did do that. But he questioned some of the things—he didn’t even know about the signs, he had no idea. I wasn’t going to even tell him that, didn’t want anybody to know about the demonstrators. But the point is, we’re building this event and he’s watching all these things we’re doing. It’s coming together, coming together and I always had this sense that sometimes, maybe they really know what they’re doing, but do they need to do everything they’re doing, getting all these celebrities there and everything. Well, Bob Trumpy got me in a whole lot of trouble with Taft.

I told Trumpy what his role would be. I said, “You’re going to introduce all the pre-speakers. You’ll be on stage, you’ll get to greet Reagan, you’ll be with him, you’ll have your picture taken, but you will not speak when Reagan is there. There’s only one speaker and that’s Bob Taft. Bob Taft will introduce the President.” The press got a hold of the fact that Trumpy was going to be there and the Cincinnati Inquirer did a big interview with him the day before, for the Sunday newspaper. We wanted a story out there. I mean, we set this up, we wanted Trumpy talking to the press so the people would see it and come down and be at the event.

Well, Trumpy got a little carried away. I was in the office 7 o’clock Sunday morning, Reagan is coming in the next day, everything is coming together nicely, look at the Cincinnati Inquirer and it says, “Reagan coming to Cincinnati,” and then the sub-headline, “Trumpy to introduce President.” I thought, Oh my God, Taft’s going to go crazy. I’ve got to call him before he calls me. It’s like ten after seven, the phone rings, it’s Bob Taft. I said, “Hi Bob. I’m here, I’ve read the paper. I trust you’ve seen it too and that’s why you’re calling.” He said, “Yeah Jim, what the hell are you doing? I thought I was introducing the President.” I said, “You are.”

This story, it was hilarious. It talked about Trumpy: “The last person he introduced was the San Diego chicken when he came to a Cincinnati Reds game, and now he’s introducing Reagan.” It was really funny. I said, “Well, Bob, I’m more upset than you are about this.” So I kind of disarmed him a little bit. I said, “In fact, we better get Trumpy on the line right now and get this worked out.” So, Trumpy’s sound asleep, it’s like 7:20, we wake him up. White House operator. I said, “Get this call set up right away and patch us all in.”

I said, “Bob, you’ve got a big story in the paper today. I don’t know if you’ve seen it yet or not.” I didn’t say, “I know I woke you up.” He said, “No, did it get in?” I said, “Yeah, it got in, it’s front page above the fold.” And he said, “Good, good, good. What’d they say?” I said, “Well, they said one thing that we’ve got to get worked out here. In the sub-headline it says that you’re introducing the President. Now Bob, I know that you know what your role is, and I know that you know that Bob Taft, who is on the line here with us, is introducing the President. But I’ve
got to ask you, how did they get that that you were doing it?” He said, “Well, I was on with them so long, it was coming together so nicely, and they asked me if I was going to introduce the President, and I just couldn’t say no.”

That’s the kind of stuff—and that guy’s the Governor today. But that’s what happens when you’re an advance man.

Knott: Sure, sure. Maybe we’ll make the transition now to your role—unless you have something else you’d like to say about your advance work.

Kuhn: I’m just trying to think now. Let me just finish something. When Reagan got there, he’d come out and everything tried to be picture perfect, logistically perfect. So that he could come out and it would be an effortless success and he could stay on schedule. He could come out, get his message out and have big events. Normally when you did, you always didn’t get front page above the fold in the Washington Post and the New York Times because it just really had to be special. But you got tremendous media coverage state-wide, certainly in that city that you went to. You wanted the President obviously to get all the credit and he did. I mean, advance guys didn’t get into the paper; we didn’t do interviews. Or you wanted the local people to get their names out. But you wanted Reagan to be the focus.

It takes that much effort for any President, but with Reagan, you always kind of expected to do more, because Reagan was always—you know, it was interesting how you could be with him in the holding room. As I said, when he went on stage he was the same person, but yet there was still a part of him that you saw, even though when you saw him at the podium sometimes or speaking to the nation or the world or whatever, you’d still see something where he was bigger than life. Now it was the nice, soft spoken, self-effacing, unassuming man who yet at the same time, in that same note, was bigger than life. Because he was so effective and so commanding. I think I saw that more in the second term than I did in the first term, because as an advance man you were just under so much pressure to make sure that everything worked.

We had a lot of security problems. Reagan’s threat level was very high the whole time. Let me just wind up with this. Things changed drastically—I actually was supposed to do the event that Reagan spoke at, at the Washington Hilton the day he was shot. I think it was the National Home Builders Association. I had met with them, that was an in-town event, we had put it together. Like the week before, the Tuesday night, six days out before that event, my boss then, Steve Studdert, said, “You’re leaving town tomorrow morning and you’re going to have to go out on the White House communications plane,” which is the C-141 with all the equipment. Not the most comfortable plane but it did have seats. Sometimes you got on the car plane, which is a C-130, we sat on these benches, canvas seats, noisy things where you had to put earplugs in, any way you could get back. Sometimes you were on Air Force One, sometimes you were on the car plane, sometimes the WHCA plane, most of the times you flew commercially.

But I’ll wind up with this. Sent to Springfield, Illinois. Governor Jim Thompson, who’s been Governor for 16 years, talked to Jim Baker and said, “Get him out here if you want to sell this economic plan. If you want to get this legislation, the tax cut passed by Congress, come to Illinois.” So it was thrown together at the last minute. I got out there, big crowd, the plan was to
have at least 10,000 people on the state capital, the front lawn, meet with the Governor to do some meetings inside, speak at a joint session of the Illinois state legislature and then do a reception. Got there on a Wednesday for a Monday event, so that was kind of rush, rush. Usually it’s seven days, five days for some. That day then when Reagan was shot, I was actually meeting with Jim Thompson in the Governor’s office. It was just the Governor and me, going through his role that day. He’s a great guy, very approachable.

His press secretary came in and said that there was a shooting at the Washington Hilton, that Jim Brady had been shot. He knew Jim Brady very well, Jim Thompson did, because Jim Brady was from Centralia, Illinois. That a policeman had been shot, a Secret Service agent, but that Reagan had not been hit. Remember that, that they didn’t know the President had been shot.

So Jim Thompson said, “Keep me posted on Brady and the others.” And I thought, God, what happened? I started thinking and I said, “If Reagan’s okay, they’re going to come in, but this is very serious. What do you want to do, Governor, do you want to keep going?” He said, “Yes, we’re about finished, aren’t we?” I said, “I need another ten minutes or so and then I want to get on the phone, call back and find out more.” Ten minutes later his Chief of Staff comes in and says Reagan had been hit and was rushed to the hospital and was going into surgery. I thought, Oh my God. Thompson looked at me and he said, “Let’s get out of here. Let’s go back to the residence and man the phones back there and work out of the mansion.”

Well, you couldn’t get through to the White House switchboard, it was jammed. I started getting calls. The Vice President was in Texas that day. We had a survey team—remember I talked about the survey team—that was in Tijuana getting ready for a trip that Reagan was going to make two months later to meet with President [Jose] Lopez Portillo of Mexico. My boss and his boss were on that plane with others on that survey plane. They were calling me because we had a White House switchboard set up in Springfield, Illinois. They’d set the switchboard up like six days ahead of time so that we had communications, but they wanted all the bugs worked out too, so that when the President got there it was ready to go. It was all for emergency contingencies. The President has to have communications wherever he is. Overseas, you know he can be President anywhere, he doesn’t have to be in the White House.

They could get through to the Springfield switchboard, but I told them, “Look, I’m with the Governor and this is what we talked about. We want to get the Brady family back.” Brady’s father had had a serious stroke, couldn’t fly back. Then my boss had said, “Why don’t you get down, Brady’s father is in Centralia, you better get down there, there’s going to be a media onslaught down there, just to help out for a day or so?” I flew down and a couple of days later got back to Washington.

My ultimate point is, our jobs became very complicated after that, because after that, everybody who came in to meet with the President, whether in the White House or Cincinnati or overseas, had to go through a metal detector because of that. This was a terrible, the Secret Service totally dropped the ball that day, to allow one person to infiltrate the press area. Press would normally say, if they were credentialed, they weren’t checked, they weren’t nagged then, they didn’t have to go through a metal detector. Hinckley got into the press area and nobody knew it. So major
faux pas. Major, major breakdown by the Secret Service that day. So that complicated things for us obviously. Reagan’s in the hospital, he has to recover, new security measures.

But I have to tell you, what made our jobs more difficult than Hinckley was when Anwar Sadat was assassinated, with the attack on him. That’s what the Secret Service feared the most, incidents, planned incidents, a terrorist attack, something out of their control. The isolated things, they knew they could have stopped Hinckley, but how do they stop terrorism? How do they stop some massive onslaught like was set loose on Anwar Sadat? The measures were worse after Sadat. Even though we had metal detectors, we could work around that. The Secret Service were much, much more difficult to work with. It got out of control, where they were trying to take our authority away from us. I actually had the press come up to me and say, “You guys aren’t running the show any more, the Secret Service are.”

The problem was, the First Lady is under tremendous pressure. She’s worried day in and day out about Ronnie anyhow after what happened with Hinckley. When Sadat was assassinated, it was a bloody scene, as you recall. I mean, that had her—she didn’t want him to go anywhere, she didn’t want him to do anything. She put tremendous pressure on Mike Deaver and the Secret Service. Our roles became very complicated. So we had to live with that for a period of a couple of months, a few months, it was more like six months or so or even longer. Gradually it started to come back.

I have to tell you, Bill Henkel was very instrumental because we got into ’83 and we knew we had to get into a campaign mode where we had to expose Reagan to more people, bigger events, outdoor events, where there are big buildings, where there are bigger motorcades, where the Secret Service is going to have to get back into a mode they way they were. He had me go down and meet with small groups of agents, maybe ten or fifteen. There are usually about 80 on a detail that rotate in and out. They’re three-year tours, assignments. But for a year I would have meetings with groups of Secret Service agents, getting them ready, telling them what to expect on the campaign and how things were going to be different. It was just the way it had to be. That day when we were in Cincinnati, we were surrounded by big buildings, all around us. So we were able to bring it back to the way it needed to be, but very difficult time there after Sadat, after Hinckley, but even more so after Sadat.

Nancy Reagan was there as I said on top, controlling everything in that respect. We certainly didn’t want to see anything happen to Ronald Reagan. We had major battles, always major battles with the Secret Service because a lot of times—and I think I can end with this—they would try to do it the easy way. We’d say, “You can secure this. You’re just going to need more manpower.” And you had to remind the guys, we’d say, “That’s not secure enough.” You had to remind them, “He’s our boss. We’re here, we’re political appointees, we’re here. The only reason we are here is because of Ronald Reagan. You are here because you’re in the Secret Service and you’re going to protect whoever the President is. You just need to get more manpower here and work this out.”

So we would get into some major battles, sometimes we had to elevate it to Deaver. There were a couple of times I had to call Deaver on Air Force One where we had last minute disagreements, where the lead agent and I couldn’t work things out. I had to tell Deaver, “It’s going to be a press
story. It’s going to embarrass the President. They’ve got the front of the hotel roped off with police tape, keeping people away,” and we had it worked out that they would not close down the front of the hotel. This is in Gulfport, Mississippi. I said, “I don’t know what’s gotten into them and I can’t get them to take the police tape down. I want it down; it will be a major mistake if it’s not.” So Deaver would get on Air Force One with the head of the White House, not the director of the Secret Service, he would go on overseas trips but for domestic stops, the director for the White House detail would be on there. He would say, “What the hell is going on?” And he would call his agent and say, “Take it down.” We had to fight those battles.

Knott: Sure.

Kuhn: Maybe that’s enough on the first term and what advance guys do, but that’s what we did for Ronald Reagan. We had interaction with him. Even though he saw the advance guys, he knew them by face, but he really didn’t know all of them by name, because there was always this guy in between, the executive assistant, who talked to Reagan, because that’s what worked best. You didn’t need 15 different people, 20 different people talking to the President. It was best if he had one voice, one person. Reagan’s life was always structured where he had somebody there as kind of a manager. Going back to when he was Governor and maybe even beyond that, so he always had kind of a right-hand guy. That’s the way they did it in the first term and that’s the way it was done. Dave Fischer did it in the first term; I did it in the second term.

Knott: Tell us how you came to take David Fischer’s place, how that came about.

Kuhn: I wasn’t sure, I was married—this was difficult when you’re advancing, because I had met my wife in Los Angeles at the end of the first year, in Palm Springs. She was still in college at UCLA [University of California-Los Angeles]. She graduated in March of ’82, moved here in May of ’82. I’m advancing, and you’re gone all the time. We got married in May of ’83 and had our first baby in February of ’84. I actually pulled myself off the China trip because I knew it was going to conflict with our first born, and that’s Caitlin, at UVa. I didn’t want to miss that. I knew Reagan was going to be in China in April. I thought, We’re going to be on one of those survey trips or pre-advance trips when she’s born, you watch. And I said, “I can’t go to China.” So they gave me other responsibilities back here.

But just two last things about that. It got so complicated with the travel that at one point in ’82, I had done a stop in Peoria. I came back on a military—I actually came back on that communications plane again that had the equipment with these kinds of seats that were just kind of bolted in. Carol, then my girlfriend, wasn’t even a fiancée yet then, I had to go out again and I called her the day before and I said, “I don’t know where I’m going next but when I get back I’m going to have to leave right away.” That morning, I knew, I called her and I said, “Look, I’m coming into Andrews on a military plane. I’m coming to the White House for ten minutes to pick up another briefing, briefcase and materials, and I’ve got to go to Reagan National. I can give you ten minutes at the southwest gate and that’s it.” So I went from airport, White House, ten minutes, briefing material, saw Carol, got back in the White House car, went out to Reagan National and flew off to another city. That was your life as an advance man.
Last thing on advance, I promise. When Caitlin was born, the survey team was on their way to China, it just worked out that way. I had an event that night, the Reagans were doing something at one of the big buildings on Constitution Avenue, I can’t remember the name of it anymore, some big dinner. It was a fundraiser. Oh, I’ll tell you what it was, Julio Iglesias was going to be there, it was a fundraiser for the Princess Grace Foundation. Remember when she was killed in that auto accident? So this was one of those big glitzy events, not a policy-oriented event at all, but the Reagans are going to be there and it’s going to raise a lot of money. Nancy wanted to do it. Carol started having contractions that morning. I went to GW [George Washington] Hospital; I had to get myself out of the event. Other people in the White House advance office said, “You’ve got to do it.” I’m at the hospital.

Well, this survey team is also on the way to China. My good friend Mark Weinberg, whom I saw yesterday in New York who works for Deloitte Touche, he worked there for eight years in the White House press office. He was on that plane and he knew that Carol was getting close and he was very clever and he just knew what was going on. He started checking in before I could even tell him. He knew we were at the hospital, he just knew how to find those things out. Well, after Carol had the baby, after Carol had Caitlin, it wasn’t even 30 minutes and a nurse came in to the recovery room and she said, “We’re not sure what’s going on, but there’s some plane calling from over the Pacific Ocean that says they’re with the White House. They want to talk to you. Do you know anything about that?” I said, “I sure do. My boss Bill Henkel is on the plane.” Now ten people got on the plane to congratulate me, because these planes are all equipped with communications, called to say congratulations.

Knott: That’s neat.

Kuhn: But that was the trip that I didn’t go on in China and I would have been there if I had gone. But I have to tell you, everybody asks me, “Did you go to China?” I said, “No.” I went to the Soviet Union, I went here, there, I didn’t go to China. But I did the right thing.

Knott: You did the right thing, yes, absolutely.

Kuhn: We probably ought to get into the second term. I’m going to need to take a break here.

Knott: Okay, let’s take a break.

[BREAK]

Kuhn: The second term, I can tell you this. We were on a stop in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in July of 1984. That was before Cincinnati and this was an advance stop that I had done in Bowling Green, Kentucky. We did the National Campers and Hikers Association. I just have to tell you this quickly, how we did different things here. I’m sure you already know this. But it was a big crowd, building crowd, 20,000 people out in the middle of this field, the middle of nowhere, Bowling Green, Kentucky. Outside of Bowling Green, in fact—and then I’ll transition into the second term—but it’s amazing how you can make the most of a presidential trip.
We knew we had to take Air Force One into Fort Campbell, Kentucky. That’s a huge Army base, as you probably know, because you couldn’t get the 707 into the Bowling Green airport. The 707 takes a longer runway than a 747 does, technology. So we’re out at Fort Campbell and I thought, *Hey, that’s great, get a hold of the base commander. I bet we could do something really nice here for the troops and let them see the Commander-in-Chief.* We had a huge group there. So thousands of soldiers there to see the President and he loved that, wanted to do that. We did an environmental event. We took him into the Mammoth Cave National Park, took him deep down into a cave as an environmental event. Even though Reagan was not known as much of an environmentalist, that was our environmental event.

Then we did this other environmental event, the National Campers and Hikers Association. Huge crowd, 20,000 campers. It was during that event—we had Winnebagos as holding rooms because there were no buildings out there. We’re in a Winnebago and Reagan is speaking and we’re out there sweating in the Winnebago while he’s speaking. Dave Fischer approached me and said, “Jim, what are you going to do next?” I said, “I’ve got to get out of the advance office, Dave. I’ve been married for a year; Caitlin was just born a couple of months ago. I can’t be going all the time anymore. I want to do something else in the administration.” He said, “I’ve got the job for you.” I said, “Where, one of the agencies? That’s what I want to do.” He said, “No, I’m leaving at the end of the year.” I said, “You are?” He said, “Yes, don’t tell anybody yet. Would you do this?” And I said, “God yes, of course I would, but what do I need to do?”

He said, “You don’t need to do anything. Don’t say anything, don’t do anything. I’ll talk to the President; I’ll talk to Mrs. Reagan; I’ll talk to Jim Baker; I’ll talk to Mike Deaver.” And he said, “Nobody else needs to be engaged in that.” Then they just handed it to me. It was the one time I didn’t have to do anything. That was literally just given to me. They obviously needed somebody that they could trust, most importantly, and somebody the Reagans knew, and knew the drill. Or at least could get up to speed with the drill. Dave Fischer broke me in. He’d bring me over, he started doing this—that was the summer—I think in the fall and winter, for months, over a three- or four-month period, he would bring me over to the Oval Office. Take me through the drill, the daily drill, travel, Camp David, until he left then in early ’85.

But that job, when you were personal assistant, executive assistant, right-hand guy, whatever you want to call it—as I said earlier, Reagan was always used to having somebody there to help manage his day. That job entailed more interaction with the President than anybody else. More than the First Lady, because the First Lady didn’t see him throughout the day. She was busy with her schedule. There might be certain joint things, but for the most part, she wasn’t with him during the day. So that job, that individual, without question, spent more time with the man than anybody else.

I’d start out the day, I would meet him over in the residence. If I really had to get to him—you know, we had a lot, lot going on, if something had really changed—I would go upstairs and see him before he even came down. Not very many people could get into the residence. I mean, that’s their living quarters, who needed to be up there? That job entailed you being up there. You’d go up there all the time and they didn’t mind, because they knew what you were doing. You knew when not to bother them, but as a routine you just went up there. In the morning I’d
try not to go up there unless we’ve got so many things that are falling apart and changing today, I’ve got to tell him now before he gets downstairs. Most times, I’d just meet him at the bottom of the elevator in the mansion part of the White House, walk over, talk all the way over.

We’d get into the Oval Office, I’d tell him what he needed to know then, and then I’d call the Chief of Staff, ring him on his direct line, I’d call the Vice President on his direct line and they’d come down and start their drill. That job, in a nutshell, entailed protecting the President. Trying to eliminate all the unknowns, keeping him briefed on everything that he needed to know before he did it. “You’re going into the Cabinet room, you know you’re meeting with the congressional leadership. You’ve got your talking points, you know what you’re going to say, but don’t forget to emphasize A, B, and C.” Or, “Make special note of Senator Robert Byrd,” or this or that. “You’ve got to do this. Oh, and so-and-so wants you to add this and add that, you’ve got to do two more things also.” Make sure that he got it. Because he’s constantly—I mean, he had his speech, he had his schedule, but by the end of the day it was so marked up because of adjustments, because of changes. Or on his briefing papers, on his note cards or whatever, extra things that he had to emphasize to make sure that he completely communicated and that we had a successful meeting.

You had to keep him on schedule. But most importantly you had to keep him briefed up on who he’s going to see, remind him of it. Because he could be meeting with a head of state, head of government, he could be meeting with a group of Senators or Congressmen, and then we’re going off, we’re off to NIH [National Institutes of Health], doing something and giving something that’s involved with medical policy, or it could be something environmental. So you’re shifting gears from domestic policy to foreign policy, from political affairs to legislative. Or there might be a group of hostages that were just released coming in to see him. You know, there might be some disaster that we’re dealing with or whatever. So all these different things, throughout the day, going from A to Z, Z to A, so you’re making those adjustments.

Overriding what you did was you protected the President so that he wasn’t surprised. So that if he went somewhere, he did know ahead of time, or that he didn’t do what he wasn’t supposed to do, didn’t say what he wasn’t supposed to say, or, you know, there were those things. This was absolutely done the wrong way—and I’m going to say this on tape—but the day, September 11th, when the President was first told of what happened, the first plane going into the north tower or south tower, whichever one it was. You may recall that a staff person went out, Andy Card, Chief of Staff, went out and told the President in front of this class in Florida. Even worse than that, in front of the media, what happened.

I felt so sorry for the President that day, because of the look and what he must have been going through, in front of the cameras, in front of the press, in front of these kids, in front of the teachers. What was that poor man supposed to do? That was absolutely the wrong thing to do. Now this was just poor judgment on Andy Card’s part. Whoever was personal aide that day, personal assistant, you’ve got to step in. That’s your job. Should have stepped in that day and said, “You’ve got to get the President into the holding room. You’ve got to brief him behind closed doors.” You can’t sit him out there and tell him and just leave him there. My God, it’s just unfair to the man. The look he had on his face and what he must have been going through.
Chiefs of Staff don’t always know that. They’re thinking, they’re Chief of Staff. They’re 100 percent policy in what they’re doing. Sometimes you’re so caught up in policy, you don’t think about wait a minute, What is best for the President here? The best thing is get him the hell off the stage, get him out of that classroom and get him in here so we can brief him. That’s what I mean by protecting the President.

Knott: Your Chief of Staff at the time was Don Regan for part of that time.

Kuhn: Yes. And so many times I’d say, “Don, no, absolutely, this is wrong, because you forgot about this or that.” He knew that was my job. Don is famous because when he ran Merrill Lynch, he really built Merrill Lynch into what it is today. He was a tough guy then. I guess his famous line is, he didn’t get ulcers, he gave ulcers. He fired more people at Merrill Lynch. When he came down to the White House he was great to work with, because he would listen. He was always accessible and you could talk to him.

We had some disagreements. I’m not saying I was always right. But when you went to him with something, he’d say, “You know, that’s your job. I’m going to do exactly what you said.” I’m just trying to think of instances where we’d say, “Don, that’s not going to work because the President is not going to be happy, he’s not going to look good. This is the way we have to do it.” And we’d talk constantly, we’d talk seven days a week. When we were at Camp David, we talked every day at Camp David. But he took guidance very well.

Once again, protecting the President. In a sense you had to protect the President from himself sometimes, so that he didn’t say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing. Maybe even times from the First Lady. But most importantly from people that he was around, whether they were media, whether it was a head of state, head of government, Senators, Congressmen, any domestic, any individual, any group, to make sure that he did what he was supposed to do, that he said what he was supposed to say, that he didn’t get surprised and that things didn’t unravel, because they can. They really can.

Knott: Can you think of instances where they did?

Kuhn: Yes, I’m going to have to think about that.

Knott: Maybe you’d rather remember the good moments as opposed to the unraveling moments.

Kuhn: I can tell you one—and I want to tell it later, it’s kind of embarrassing. I can tell you now. It’s a simple thing that just got out of control, very simple. I’ll tell you right now.

We were campaigning in 1986. We were out almost frantically campaigning for Senators who were up for reelection. Reagan was the last President to really have political coattails in an election, and that was in 1980. He swept a lot of people into office in the Senate who wouldn’t have made it without him. I’m talking about senators like Paula Hawkins of Florida; Mack Mattingly, Georgia; Jim Abdnor of South Dakota; [Thomas] Slade Gorton of Washington state, and—who came back again in ’88? Was it [Jacob] Chic Hecht in ’86? There were a couple more.
Well, you know what they say sometimes, it’s not the election that’s the most difficult, it’s the reelection, because you have to defend the record. And that’s true in a lot of cases in Congress.

When these people came up again in 1986, things were kind of shaky and they were really struggling. Their numbers were bad, so it looked like we were going to lose the Senate. So we’re out really campaigning, because we had had a Republican Senate, of course the Democrats had had the House since 1954, and we were going to change that. We had a Republican Senate and Reagan was able to get his economic development plan through, economic recovery plan through in 1981 because of the Republican Senate. It was going to be the end of the world if we don’t hang on to majority control of the Republicans, so we’re out all over the place campaigning. It was pretty rigorous and Reagan—and I want to talk to you about Reagan and travel, too, in this whole thing.

Some Presidents love to travel. George Bush, former President Bush, couldn’t go enough. To his detriment, he was gone too much. Clinton liked to travel a lot but didn’t go as much—maybe he did go more than Bush, I don’t know. But you can go too much. Deaver controlled that schedule, then others controlled that after that. Nancy had a say in it, when Reagan would go, because you could over expose yourself by traveling. You’ve got to be back here doing things. There are meetings in the Cabinet room, going to the Hill, bringing members of Congress down to the White House.

Well, we were up in Spokane. It looked pretty shaky for some of these people and it kind of looked like we were going to lose majority control, but we had to do everything we could in some of these close races. We had stop after stop after stop. Reagan was doing fine. We’re all tired, but Reagan, he’s doing fine. He was upset about something he saw in the newspaper or saw on TV or both places. If you recall, we had hostages being held by Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah and Hamas in Beirut, Lebanon, various places in the world. Some had been held for a number of years and that’s what started the whole thing with Iran-Contra. We can talk about that part of it too, some point here. I’m sure you’ve got tons on that but I’ll have some comments.

We’re in Spokane, but what had him the most upset is one of the hostages was from the Spokane area. I didn’t know it, I didn’t even see it on the news. Reagan saw it on TV I guess, and it was in the morning paper, where John Poindexter—this is before Iran-Contra broke—and representatives of the NSC [National Security Council] knew that the family wanted to meet with Reagan and they were told no. Now, once again, that’s not really—protecting the President would have been me stepping in saying, “John, what the hell are you doing? The President’s going to be upset if you don’t do this. You’ve got to do it, this is what Ronald Reagan would want to do. Get it on the agenda. If you want, we’ll talk to the President about it but I guarantee you he’ll say yes.”

Well, I didn’t know. He didn’t tell me. Poindexter didn’t say, didn’t tell the President. Reagan saw it and was damned upset about it. So it’s early in the morning, we’re all kind of tired from these campaign stops, a lot of traveling. He sees this, he’s upset, and he’s not normally upset. He saw that. We talked about it and I said, “We’ll get it fixed, we’ll work it out. If it’s too late for you to see them, we’ll make sure you call them, whatever.” I said, “That’s a major mistake. I’m
sorry that happened. I know you would have met with the family. Let’s see what we can do to repair it.”

In the meantime, he gets out of the shower, he’s got a towel wrapped around him and he’s trying to get dressed. I said, “We’ve got to go here pretty soon, Mr. President, and I’ve got some changes I’ve got to give you, you’ve got to plug some people in the speech. But we’ll do that later. We’ll do it in the holding room.” He said, “No, let’s do it now.” I said, “No, let’s do it later.” He said, “No, [banging on table], let’s do it now.” I said, “Okay, we’ll do it now.” Water is dripping off of him. I said, “Here’s a couple of changes in the speech, political speech. You’ve got to acknowledge these people at the beginning. One, she adores you and you know her and she’s state chairman and she’s probably going to run for office.”

She was state Republican chairman in the state of Washington and her name was Jennifer Dunn. She’s the senior representative now, she’s been in the House for about 12 years or so, she’s been in the leadership. She’s been fairly visible. I’m adding this and when I get to Jennifer, I said, “You know Jennifer Dunn.” He said, “Who is it?” And I said, “Jennifer Dunn.” He said, “How does she spell—that’s the last name?” We weren’t connecting. So about two or three different times, we would bicker back and forth every once in a while, and I said, “Dunn, D-U-N-N. Jennifer.” You know, like, “That’s the last time, I’m going to write it in!” So, by damn, he puts down Dunn and then Jennifer. I’m thinking, No problem. Well he’s up giving the speech and he’s going through the acknowledgments and he said, “And your wonderful state chairman of the great state of Washington, Dunn Jennifer.” And I thought, Oh my God, what are we going to do?

Mitch Daniels—and you know where he is now, at OMB [Office of Management and Budget]—was our political director. He looked at me, he’s sitting there, he turned around and looked at me like, What in the hell are you doing, Jim? And I just wanted to grab the President and pull him off the stage. He didn’t realize what he had done and I looked around the audience and not everybody picked up, because not everybody listened, you can’t catch. But a lot of people heard. I thought, Boy, I know Jennifer Dunn heard this, and I know the media heard. So right after the speech we get in the back hallway and we’re going into the reception and I said, “We’ve got to go in the holding room.” And he said, “Why do we need to go in the holding room?” And I said, “Because we’ve got to talk.”

They rushed this other group up for a VIP reception and I said, “I’ve got to tell you something and I’ve got to tell you in the holding room.” He said, “Okay, we’ll go to the holding room.” He didn’t like to go to the holding rooms. I said, “Look, I really screwed something up here and it’s my fault.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “This morning, when I was giving you those names?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “I gave you the name Jennifer Dunn.” He said, “Yes, I acknowledged her, I wrote it down. What’s wrong?” I said, “Well, I gave it to you backwards. I gave you her last name first and Jennifer.” He said, “I didn’t say it that way, did I?” “Yes, you did.” He said, “No, I didn’t.” I said, “Mr. President, you did. And you’ve got to go into this room, there’s going to be a couple hundred people, and you’ve got to—you know what to do, I don’t need to tell you, just be yourself, but take care of that problem right up front.”

And he did, in a very humorous way. He said, “You know, I just want you to know I haven’t totally lost my mind. I’m not totally distracted today, I know Jennifer Dunn very well, and I’m
very fond of her, even though I said her name wrong back there, I know her name is Jennifer Dunn.” Everybody laughed and everything was fine, but those things happen. They just do.

**Knott:** Was it difficult for you, when you had that little meeting in the morning, when he’s standing there in his towel and it got a little tense, and you had to sort of speak up, was that a hard thing for you to do?

**Kuhn:** What I didn’t like was, I thought we were going to get off on the wrong track because he was upset, and I didn’t want to make matters worse. I was kind of upsetting him more, but he was upset about what happened with the NSC—I had already climbed on Poindexter about that—and we ended up doing a phone call. But it was too late, they weren’t right there in Spokane, we couldn’t get them right there with us. He called them and then he sent them a letter and everything else to take care of that. I thought, *We’re not serving the President well if we’re upsetting him.* Once again, I said to you hours ago, “You’ve got to be pretty stupid to upset Ronald Reagan.” Well, we did. We had him upset that day and things didn’t go very well. Then we embarrassed him, we embarrassed him in front—it was our fault that that happened, not his.

**Knott:** How often would something like that happen?

**Kuhn:** Very rarely, very rarely, because we worked so closely together. Here’s the thing, he enabled you to do the job because he would tell you everything, or essentially everything. He knew that you needed the information to do your job. He was 100 percent trusting, the most trusting individual I’ve ever been around. Fortunately Nancy trusted me also and with information you could really help him, you could really be effective in that job.

In fact, I don’t mind saying this one bit, Larry Speakes once said to me—and Shultz was so difficult to deal with, George Shultz—he said, “You know, if Shultz were just a little bit nicer, he doesn’t realize what he’s missing out on. There’s a whole lot more you could do to make things better for George Shultz if you wanted to, but since he’s so difficult, you don’t do it, do you?” And I said, “Bare minimum. We take care of the President, we get George in and we get him out and that was about it.” I mean, we could have made life a whole lot better, but he was just that difficult and we didn’t like the way he treated people. George Shultz could be very nice to you in the Oval Office in front of the President. As soon as you walked out that door, it was like Jekyll and Hyde. I’m not here to trash George Shultz, but, sorry, I had to throw that in.

I’m going to throw some other instances out in terms of travel and that will stimulate some other things here, I think. When we went to Geneva, it was the best mood I’d ever seen Nancy Reagan in, because as great as it was being First Lady, sometimes I think it had to be pure hell for her because she was so worried about everything, every hour and every day. When we went to Geneva, for the first Reagan-[Mikhail] Gorbachev summit, we left on a Saturday night. She was in the best humor, she was in the absolutely best mood. I guess we timed it—we got there in the morning. She was just in a delightful mood because it was going to happen, because she had such a role in it and she got these two together. She wasn’t going around saying, “I did it, I did it,” she’d never say that, but she got Ronnie to open up and it was finally becoming a reality.
That was big because we were going to see the Soviets for the first time. The United States and the Evil Empire after Reagan referred to them, and nothing had taken place since [Leonid] Brezhnev and Nixon. There had been this void as far as meetings there, so it was a big trip. We’d gotten there Sunday morning and Reagan had a day of briefings and he gets settled in. It all started on Monday, then. We were staying at our chateau in Geneva and Gorbachev was staying at his place but then we had our meeting place, our meeting site, and they had their meeting site. The way it had ended up, where the last meeting had taken place, I guess, was they had met—going back to Nixon-Brezhnev for their summit—they had met at the Soviet site, so it was our turn for Gorbachev to come to us, going back on protocol. Crazy little thing, but it’s just amazing what goes into this when you’re President.

We had left our chateau, gone over to our meeting site, plenty of time ahead of time, just in case Gorbachev was running early, got settled in. People around the President that morning were myself, Don Regan, John Poindexter, George Shultz. Once again, George Shultz wasn’t always bad to be around, he was fine on that. In fact, he was just fine on that trip, no problems. That was about it. Of course there were hundreds, I mean people everywhere. You have 3,000 press, you’ve got State Department people, you’ve got White House people, you’ve got all these planes. You had Air Force One that went over, you have the back up Air Force One that went over, you had other people in military planes. You had a 747 full of press. Other people who flew in commercially. You’ve got a lot of people there.

The funniest thing—we’re waiting and looking at the schedule, and it’s about 15 minutes before Gorbachev and we’re waiting for the Secret Service or somebody. The advance men come up and tell us Gorbachev was on his way. I guess we got that about ten or 12 minutes of, they said he just left. We knew the schedule; he’d be there ten minutes later or whatever it was. Now this is an historic greeting that’s going to take place in front of a lot of people. It was all set up months ahead of time for this photo. Press platform, the size of it, the staging, the angle of the photo, just everything. Reagan, his valet, of course—they cook the meals overseas and took care of the clothes and that—he said, “Eddie, I guess I’ll be needing my coat now.”

My heart just fell to my feet. I thought, What, did he say coat? I thought, Oh my God. I don’t know if we’re doing the right thing here. The reason is, I knew when Gorbachev got out, you’re at the front door, you go down these steps and maybe it’s another ten or 15 feet to where the car pulls up. This is an historic photo where he greets him down at the car but they walk up onto the steps to shake hands. There are always those who said, “Reagan’s old and feeble,” this and that. Gorbachev is much younger, and I thought, Gorbachev’s going to get out of that car, no coat on, no hat on, Reagan’s going to be bundled up like the old feeble man. And I thought, Whoa, I’ve got to get him out of that coat.

I said, “Mr. President,” I said—and everybody is right there, all that took about ten seconds—I said, “Mr. President, I don’t think you’re going to be needing that.” Shultz and Regan and Bud McFarlane are all there, Poindexter. Don Regan, I think, said, “What do you mean, Jim? Of course he needs his coat.” Shultz is looking at me like I’m a fool. I said, “Well, here’s my concern. There’s 3,000 press out there. This is an historic photo, got to get off to the right start. I’m concerned Gorbachev’s not going to have a coat on. He’s going to get out and the President is going to be all bundled up and that’s not what we want. We’re going to get off to the wrong
start. This is an historic photo.” And Bud McFarlane then spoke up and said, “Oh, Mr. President, Gorbachev will have his coat on.” Shultz looked at the President and then looked at me and said, “Of course he’ll have his coat on.” Then Don Regan tried to console me, he said, “Jim, that’s all right, don’t worry about it. That’s okay. Let the President put his coat on.”

They all walk away and I’m going, This is not right, this is not right. I’ve got to do something here. It’s just the President and me standing there. I said, “Mr. President, I don’t want to make a big deal. I know we’ve got three days here, this is huge, and I don’t want to make a big deal out of your coat and get off to a funny start here. But we’ve got a couple of minutes, can I just talk to you about my concern?” He said, “Sure.” I said, “What you just heard there, Don Regan, Bud McFarlane, George Shultz? They don’t have the slightest idea whether Gorbachev is going to have his coat on or not. They don’t know, how would they know? They just don’t know. They’re just assuming.”

He said, “They’re probably right, Jim, don’t you think?” I said, “Maybe and maybe not.” He said, “What do you mean?” Now it’s starting to irk him a little bit. I said, “This photo, all the press out there, we want you to look the way you’re supposed to look and we don’t want you to look bundled up if he’s not going to be bundled up. The contrast would not be good. It will be written about.” He said, “I’m wearing a coat, Jim.” Now I’m getting him a little more—not angry, but I know he’s biting his lip a little bit. I said, “Okay, last thing, I just want to ask you one question.” He said, “Okay.” He looks at me and I said, “If I’m right, and they’re wrong, and you go out all bundled up and Gorbachev has no hat on, comes out in a business suit and you’re standing there and you have your scarf on and coat and he’s got his suit all tailored and looking great, who’s going to look stupid before the whole world?”

He said, “All right, damn it, have it your way.” He ripped off the scarf, he unbuttoned his coat, kind of tossed them to me. He said, “How’s that?” I said, “Great.”

We get out there to greet and you may recall the photo.

**Knott:** Very much.

**Kuhn:** Gorbachev got out, his fedora on, a scarf, all bundled up in his heavy coat, looking like this old sinister man, and there’s Reagan, standing there, looking beautiful, in this tailored blue suit, looking spectacular, no coat on. I mean, we one-upped the Soviets like you could not believe. That was written about and written about and written about. The photos that ran—Reagan looked A-plus, Gorbachev looked like a D-minus.

Two things—at that time over that two- to three-day period when we would bid farewell, after meetings, they would go back to their place, we would go to ours, and then there were the plenary sessions in the afternoon, one-on-ones. Every time they said good-bye they knew they were going to greet again and every time they greeted they would greet in front of the press. Well, the only real greeting that mattered was the first one. The last thing Gorbachev said to Reagan every time they said good-bye, before they saw one another again hours later was, “Coats on or coats off?” He was so taken aback by that.
There was an op-ed piece that I saved written a few years ago when Edmund Morris came out with his book that we didn’t like, we thought we got a bad book. So many people came out and wrote things about Reagan, when they talked about Geneva, and it was Ken Adelman, who was the head then for Reagan, of the Defense Control Arms—

Knott: ACDA.

Kuhn: Yes, Arms Control Defense Agency. He wrote about that. I didn’t even realize this but the Soviet press secretary later admitted, I guess publicly somewhere, said, “They beat us at the very beginning and we never recovered from it.” All over that coat. We had no idea. I thought it was going to be the other way. Nobody had thought of that; nobody had thought of that. Just things like that happened on that stop. What time are we right now?

Knott: Go ahead.

Kuhn: That stop, also in Geneva, the very first—oh, Gorbachev gets there. They go in and they’re supposed to have a one-on-one for 20 minutes. That’s what both sides agreed to, 20 minutes. Now you’re going to know why I’ve got this thing against Shultz, I guess, because he really nailed me on this. Yes, I forgot, I said he was good on that trip, I couldn’t be more wrong. He did nail me on this trip and nailed me good. I deserved it maybe, I don’t know, you decide.

They go in for their one-on-one. No staff, no note takers, just interpreters. They had to have interpreters. So it’s Reagan, Gorbachev, Reagan’s interpreter and Gorbachev’s interpreter. They go 20 minutes. People, when they’re with the President, the Prime Minister, then General-Secretary and later they changed his title, the President, people get worried, almost borderline panic. Well, people are already starting to pace on our side, “Well, it’s coming up on 15 minutes. It’s coming up on 20 minutes.” Then we go beyond 20 minutes. We’re at 25 and 30 minutes and Don Regan is the most nervous now. He said, “Jim, they’ve gone beyond 20 minutes. They’re at half an hour. What about the meeting?” I said, “Running late.” I wasn’t going to go in that room, that could be the dumbest thing you could do. I said, “They’re fine. We’ve got to let them go, just let them go.” Well, this meeting went, I can’t remember the exact time, but it went like almost an hour, plus or minus.

At 25-30 minutes Regan comes to me again—oh, Regan has his guys come to me then. He had Tom Dawson and Dennis Thomas, his senior staff. “Jim, when are you going to break up that meeting?” I said, “It’s going to end soon. Don’t worry about it, it’s fine. Just give them a few more minutes. Now we’re at 40, 45 minutes. Regan comes back and he says, “Jim, you’ve got to do something here. The meeting was supposed to end.” I said, “Don, let me tell you something. I don’t think we should walk into that room. You shouldn’t walk into that room. I shouldn’t. Nobody should walk into the room. That’s my sense. Leave them alone, we’ve got to leave them alone.” He said, “Okay.” Then I started to hide from Regan. I didn’t even want him to see me, because I’m not going, nobody is going to make me go in that room. And if they go in now, I don’t care. That could be a big mistake and that might upset Reagan, it might upset Gorbachev. Let them meet! Maybe it’s the best thing for the world.
So Regan finally finds me and I think we’re now coming up on an hour or thereabouts, and I just shook my head. He said, “Jim, talk to Bud McFarlane. Talk to Bud about it.” I talked to Bud. Bud thinks that the meeting ought to end. I said, “Bud, I just think you guys are wrong on this.” He said, “Okay. I agree. Would you do one thing for me? Just talk with George Shultz about it.” I said, “That’s all I have to do, huh? Talk to George Shultz?” Well, Shultz was with [Eduard] Shevardnadze, the foreign minister. I couldn’t get Shultz to come over to me. He was saying, “Come to me if you need to talk.” Shevardnadze spoke, they all understood English and I think they could speak English, but they hardly ever would. Shevardnadze is a pretty nice guy but I told Shultz what was going on.

I said, “Mr. Secretary, we’re going back and forth, back and forth.” I didn’t give him all the details. I said, “Now it’s getting to the point where Bud thinks the meeting should end. Maybe we should let it go, I don’t know, Mr. Secretary. They’ve asked me to come and talk to you about the meeting being broken up.” I didn’t give him all the details about how I thought it was the worst thing to do and this and that, it would be a big mistake, Reagan would be upset, Gorbachev would be upset. “They’ve asked me to talk to you about it.” Well he says, out loud, loud enough so that Shevardnadze could hear it and others, he said, “Jim, if you’re stupid enough to walk in that room and break up that meeting, then you don’t deserve to have the job that you have.” I said, “Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.”

That ended up in a bunch of books, because a bunch of people heard that. Nancy Reagan put it in her book, Shultz put it in his book. I don’t know, I just got clobbered by Shultz on that one. I should have never talked to him, I should have just told Bud, “You talk to Shultz.” But anyhow. Those are the two stories out of Geneva.

Two other quick things. After the first day, I think, at some point Reagan was supposed to invite him to Washington. Shultz or McFarlane or Regan or somebody said, “Now we’re going to talk about how you’re going to approach Gorbachev.” Ah, it was after they went down onto the shores of Lake Geneva, where Reagan took Gorbachev for a walk, and we had this plan where they would lead the plenary session the first day with the big group, break away and have another one-on-one, where Reagan would go for a walk, go down to this little house, cabana, down on the shores of Lake Geneva where they could have a one-on-one. Fireplace going. That’s where Reagan told Gorbachev that he could never win an all-out arms race with the United States because we would always outspend the Soviet Union, which we did as you know. Put them out of business.

But when they walked back up, they had a long meeting down there, that day was over and then we had the dinner that night. While they were standing in the driveway, Reagan said, “Oh, I want you to come to Washington. Let’s talk a little while, we’ve got to work out timeframes.” We got back and had a debriefing and I think it was Regan who said, “Now tomorrow you’ve got to make sure and invite him to Washington.” He said, “It’s done, he already agreed to come.” He said, “When did you do it?” He said, “Standing in the driveway when he got in the car.” But it was a very good summit.

We can talk about Reykjavik later or maybe you’ve got enough on Reykjavik. I do have to talk to you about Reykjavik.
Knott: That would be good, I’ll put that down.

Kuhn: No more Shultz stories.

Knott: Why don’t we break for lunch?

[BREAK]

Kuhn: I think we talked about plenary sessions and their subsequent meeting down along the shores of Lake Geneva and planning the next time they would meet. In fact, as it turned out then, as you recall, it was Geneva, Reykjavik, Iceland, then the White House, then the Soviet Union, and then we had a quick get-together up in New York, just to kind of make the transition to George Bush and Gorbachev was there. Even though Reagan had invited him to come to Washington and he accepted, we were just beginning to try to find some common ground, the elimination of the intermediate nuclear force, and it wasn’t coming together as quickly as we thought. It was Gorbachev who had proposed getting together in Reykjavik and that came together very quickly, in less than two weeks, and it goes like ten days or 12 days or something.

But it was interesting, our ambassador to Iceland was Nick Ruwe. That was the gentleman who hired me into the campaign. Supposedly, Nixon called Reagan and asked if he would appoint Ruwe as his next ambassador to Iceland when it opened up. Supposedly part of it is Nixon didn’t ask Reagan for anything, that was the only thing that he asked Reagan to do the whole time. They talked quite often, and Nixon was helpful to Reagan. I talked to Nixon a couple of times, he was a delightful man. I think different as a former President than obviously as President, or at least at the end of his Presidency or the last couple of years or whatever.

Knott: Nixon would call with advice, or—?

Kuhn: He would call sometimes with advice. He would call to congratulate him on a great speech or a great initiative that the President had started. Saying, you’re on the right track, this is the right path. Or he would call from time to time just to offer some unsolicited advice, which Reagan very much appreciated. Reagan knew Nixon because Nixon sent him on special envoys to various parts of the world, China and elsewhere, when he was Governor of California. So they had a past relationship and Reagan liked him.

In Reykjavik, it was interesting, with everything going on and the lack of time that they had to put it together, Nick Ruwe being an old advance man and being our ambassador in Iceland—we sent our advance team over, obviously—was a natural to have there and working with the Soviets, and the massive press coverage for those things. You know, 3,000 press that go to those things. Then that all came together. The only point—and I’m sure you’ve heard this part that I want to make about Reykjavik—was that so much seemed to be happening so fast there. We got there on a Thursday night. Nancy didn’t go; Mrs. Reagan didn’t go on that trip because Raisa Gorbachev wasn’t supposed to go—and then showed up a couple of days later.
I guess we got there on a Thursday night. There was always that coldness between the two of them, I think you know that. In fact, I remember after we had our first day, the two men, the two leaders, had their morning and afternoon sessions—we didn’t see Mrs. Reagan until the afternoon, after her sessions with and any deals that she did or undertakings with Raisa Gorbachev—there was a break before dinner for a couple of hours. Of course, the President said, “How was your day, honey?” Her first words were, “Raisa Gorbachev is one cold cookie.” That relationship was always icy the whole time, that’s the way it was. All I can say is that it wasn’t because of Nancy Reagan, I know that for a fact. Fortunately there was chemistry that continued to develop between Reagan and Gorbachev. It got better and better.

In Iceland, as you know—I won’t go on this long—it was getting to the point where they would eliminate all nuclear weapons eventually and take a step in that direction, but there was the big condition on Reagan giving up Star Wars, as the press referred to it, the Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan thought he had a deal but in the end said no, and that’s what broke off the talks so abruptly. I’ll never forget that. We’re getting into Sunday night now, early Sunday evening, it’s dark. There were several times where there were breaks in between where he would come out and Shultz was in those meetings. I know Shultz gave you all this, because he was there first hand, and would come out, brief the rest of the team. They not only needed to brief, but they needed to get feedback also. Just checking everything, clearing everything. Then going back in and making more progress, breaking again, more progress. Then it all coming to an abrupt end the way it did.

But the point I want to make there—and I know Shultz, he was there, he knows—I’d just never seen Ronald Reagan that way before, had never seen him with such a look. I mean, he looked distraught to me, very upset, extremely, very taken aback, upset, borderline distraught. Gorbachev was kind of like, So be it. You could tell, just to me you could tell who really wanted this more than the other one. It was like Gorbachev thought, Well, we can live with the world the way it is. Reagan wanted to end that and wasn’t able to pull that off there.

Knott: Was that as down as you’ve ever seen him?

Kuhn: Yes, without question. Never—the only other time I saw him kind of down, but not nearly that down, was when Nancy went in to have her breast surgery for breast cancer. That only hit him the day of, really, he was fine that whole week, then it finally hit him that Saturday morning. I’ll just tell you that real quick and I’ll go back to Reykjavik.

He was so consumed by it. He was busy that week and he was okay, but then it kind of hits you and it hit him. It was early in the morning, 6:30 in the morning, and we were supposed to leave about 6:45 or so and getting stuff together. Dr. Davis her half-brother was up there. Nancy was already at the hospital; she’d been out there for a couple of days I think or something. I remembered that he needed something. I was thinking, What does he need out at the hospital? He’s got down time, he won’t want to work. I said, “Mr. President, we’re not scheduled to leave for ten minutes. You need some things from the Oval Office that we didn’t bring up. You need this, you need that. Papers, briefing materials.” He said, “Okay.”
I could tell, he was only thinking about her and he was ready to go. I said, “Mr. President, I’m going to go to the Oval Office and get these papers and I’ll come back upstairs and meet you.” He’s not listening to me. He’s already halfway to the hospital. He said, “Okay, okay.” I was down in the Oval Office, I wasn’t down there more than a few minutes, came out, was on the colonnade in front of the Rose Garden, there goes the motorcade, took off, left. I knew he was preoccupied with this, no big deal. But the big deal was, he left the press. We couldn’t helicopter that morning because of a low ceiling, you can lift off in anything but you can’t land, obviously. So they had to motorcade out to the Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Well, the pool wasn’t in there, they weren’t ready because he left ten minutes early. He went out there with no press in the motorcade. So the press staff was upset at me, and I said, “Well look, I got left too, so don’t feel bad.” In fact, a friend of mine in Ohio said, “Say, I read in the paper you got left the other day,” because the pool got that. Said, “Reagan left his assistant and everything else,” was that preoccupied with that surgery.

But this was different. In my mind he was really a distraught man there, in a sense, because he wanted it so badly. I think he felt two things. I think for the most part felt that that might have been the only opportunity to ever do this.

**Knott:** You’re talking about Reykjavik.

**Kuhn:** Yes. That that was the end, that maybe they wouldn’t get together again after that.

**Knott:** Right.

**Kuhn:** And that he had missed an opportunity. That maybe, it was certain—well, not maybe, he wasn’t certain that he had done the right thing by saying that we had to have SDI in return, instead of giving it up in return for eliminating all nuclear missiles. Wow. So we were standing there, Gorbachev’s there. They’re having a little conversation out by the limos and I think Shultz probably told you this or you read press accounts, but Gorbachev said something to the effect that, “I’m sorry this didn’t work out.” Reagan’s response was, “Well, you could have said yes.”

We didn’t know—as I said, Mrs. Reagan wasn’t there. We got in the car. Of course everybody’s looking at me: Where are we going, what are we doing? Are we going right to Air Force One and getting the hell out of here? Are we going to go back to the embassy and meet the embassy staff that we were supposed to? Are we still going to speak to—we had 5,000 Navy and Air Force personnel out at the air base then, it’s still there today, in Reykjavik, Keflavik Naval Air Station—or are we just going to get on the plane and go out?” Nobody knew. I said we gotta ask the man. Usually we don’t have to ask him because it’s already worked out ahead of time, but I got in the car with him, we’re sitting there in front of all the press. I said, “Mr. President, I know you’ve got a tremendous amount on your mind, but we don’t know what you want to do now. We don’t know where you want to go.”

I said, “Here are your options. You’re scheduled to go to the embassy, greet staff, speak at the Navy and Air Force personnel at Keflavik, get on the plane and go. You could just go to the plane and go, you could go right out to the Keflavik, speak to the troops, which I think is very
important. We can have the embassy staff go out there and you could greet them out there. We could work around it, we could make this adjustment, but you’ve got to tell us what you want to do.” He waited and waited, 10-15 seconds, and he said, “Why don’t we just stay with the schedule and do what we’re supposed to do.”

We got back to the embassy, we were outside, it was warm, and we were going to greet everybody outside. He’s just standing there, just looking with this forlorn look on his face. Everybody stayed away from him. They knew. Everybody could tell he was very upset. I’m just watching him. I thought, God, he’s in this state. I had the sense, is this really going to impact this man for the long term? Is he going to be all right? I just worried because I’d never seen him that way. I knew he’d snap out of it. It was just very unusual, highly unusual. But then when the people came out, he was kind of okay, better, but still way off what he normally was. Then when he gave the speech to the troops out at the Naval air station, it was great. You would have never known there was a problem when he was at the podium.

Then we got on Air Force One and he was back to, “What did I do back there?” And I thought, just leave him alone, leave him alone. And everybody’s asking me, “How is he?” And I said, “I don’t know, just leave him alone.” And we did. About halfway back—it’s like a six and a half hour flight coming back or something—halfway back across the Atlantic he came back and there was the old Ronald Reagan, smiling, bouncing and everything. He said, “I’m okay now. I gave it a lot of thought. I know I made the right decision back there. We couldn’t give up SDI, not for America’s future. I made the right decision. I wasn’t sure, but I know now I did.” No problem, snapped right out of it.

Of course, that was October of ’86. Then we had 13 months before the next one at the White House. Then it was, what, seven or eight months before we went to Moscow after that.

Knott: Let me ask you about another trip unrelated to Gorbachev, and that was the trip to Bitburg and the cemetery. Were you—?

Kuhn: Oh, yes.

Knott: Any recollections from that particular event? Because that was so controversial.

Kuhn: Oh, God. Once again, there was a survey team that went over to look for various things, to look at that whole trip. For that one we were in Germany for the G7, before it became G8. We went to Bergen-Belsen and we went to Bitburg. Also on that trip, that was ’85, we went to Spain, we went to France, we went to Portugal. So the survey team was over there.

The Germans wanted to, Helmut Kohl wanted to, and I can’t remember all the specifics now, it was important for Kohl to take Reagan to the cemetery. He wanted that. Deaver and the survey team went there. They knew after the fact what we didn’t know in the beginning, if you go to any cemetery where there are German soldiers buried in Germany, the odds are there are going to be some SS buried there. The press checked it out and there were two, I guess, were there not? Or were there more buried there, I can’t remember. This was the smallest cemetery, it was tiny. We lived with that. That story broke I think in either January or February of 1985. Every day, from
that point, February, March, April, May, we lived with that for about five months. It just wouldn’t go away.

This story just kept continued to evolve. But this spoke highly of Ronald Reagan. I realize you’re well aware of this, but the only way Reagan was not going to go was if Kohl came to him and said, “We’re not going to go.” Because Reagan gave him his commitment. Kohl said, “I want you to go to this cemetery. It’s important to me, etc. etc. I need to do this. Will you go on that trip?” And Reagan said, “Yes.” Now, they didn’t talk about the possibility that SS agents were buried there. But Reagan, I mean, God, every day, the press and at press conferences, it just would not go away.

At one point Kohl called him about when it was really at its pinnacle. I don’t know if that was a month or two months later, however long it was. It was just boiling over. They spoke for 45 minutes. Of course, we were all hoping that Kohl was going to pull the plug, because we knew Reagan wouldn’t back out. Reagan would never, not after he gives his word, absolutely not. Kohl said he still wanted to do it. That’s a long time to be on the phone. Reagan’s calls normally didn’t go that long. I asked him. “Any new developments?” He said, “Nope. We’re going.” I said, “I know, you committed to go. You gave him your word.” He said, “No, he still wants to do it.”

But I mean Kohl was getting beaten up, Reagan was getting ripped apart, as you know. So we just had to go forward. Then that day, we tried to do everything we could to make it an event that would work. In fact, General [Matthew] Ridgeway, who had served there, came and said, “Mr. President, it’s as if you’re in trouble and you don’t deserve to be in trouble for this. I want to do anything I can to be helpful,” and said he wanted to be there that day, to show up also, having such a role in World War II. “How can I be helpful? I’ll be there, I’ll do anything I can.” Well, as it worked out, General Ridgeway and a counterpart placed a wreath there.

As it turned out, that day, the day of—the staff, we’re all kind of uptight about this. I definitely was, I think Mrs. Reagan was. The President was okay about it. Ridgeway and the German general were going to be there, but Reagan and Kohl were still supposed to be right there with them. I had a full briefing on it, the way it was going to work, and Reagan needed to know. Nancy heard me talking to the President and she said, “No, Jim. That’s not what we’re doing.” I said, “Okay. Then we need to get Mike Deaver in here because this is what Mike worked out, Mrs. Reagan. And if we’ve got to change it, Mike’s got to change it.” She said, “You better get him in here.” I got Mike on the phone. I said, “Mike, I’m in the suite, you’d better come down here right away.” He knew what it was, he knew I was in trouble.

He said, “Look, Nancy, this is what we’ve got to do. They’re going to be there, but they’re not going to actually place the wreath. They’ll watch the two generals place the wreath. We had no choice but to do it this way. They’ll be in the picture, they’re going to be there when the wreath is placed. That’s what Helmut Kohl, it’s what the Germans want to do.” She took it, she accepted it. Mike and Nancy even embraced after that. That’s how emotional this whole thing was because it had just been wearing us down. We weren’t being worn down, but it was just on our shoulders that whole time.
But I remember, when we helicoptered over there, when we landed, there was this very beautiful—it was impeccable, well-groomed that day obviously—but it was so small. The first thought we had was, that little patch there, with this small number of graves, it caused this controversy for almost six months with the press, almost around the world. Especially here and especially in Germany. And there it was, that tiny little cemetery. And then we did it and it was over.

But the most important thing is, Reagan could have said no. Nobody knew better than Nancy Reagan that once he put his foot down, whenever he puts his foot down or whenever he gave a commitment, you had nothing to worry about. Absolutely, it was guaranteed. Nobody could change his mind, nobody.

Knott: I’ll ask you about another event and see if you have any specific recollections related to this event, that’s the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger in late January of ’86. Do you recall any particular reaction of the President on that day?

Kuhn: He had a meeting in the Oval Office. The meeting had gotten underway and it was like a 30-minute meeting or whatever. I had a little office right outside the Oval Office, between the Cabinet room and the Oval. I can’t remember what the meeting was. It was small, four or five people. I don’t even know that it was anybody from the outside, it might have just been a couple of staff members, maybe somebody from the outside, I can’t remember. It might have been a business leader. It might have been an internal meeting, an NSC meeting even.

I remember Pat Buchanan was director of communications, came flying down, ran through our area and said, “The space shuttle has just blown up on take off.” He went bursting into the Oval Office, as he should; he did the right thing. Normally you would never do that without talking with us first. So I went in right behind him when he told them. The President was deeply saddened, shocked. There was silence. I said, “Mr. President, I guess maybe we better go in and monitor what’s going on on the TV, don’t you think?” Don Regan was there I remember and everybody said, “Yes, we better. Let’s do that right now.” So we went into the den, where he had some private meetings, where he had lunch, just off the Oval Office there. And we watched it. I can’t remember if we watched it for 15 minutes, 20 minutes or whatever, but there was an historic photo taken there of Reagan watching it and his look of deep sadness and shock on his face as we watched it over and over again, what was going on.

Those were hard times. When something like that happened, he was very good at dealing with all situations, but that was a very difficult time for him, very difficult. Because it wore on his mind for a long, long time, that that had happened. That it had happened, that the astronauts had been killed, and the program and what it meant and everything. But the loss of human life bothered him most importantly. It was suggested that he address the nation that night. He said he very much wanted to do that. Then going forward with the policy, the commission to do the study, which took quite some time as you recall. Then he asked about a memorial service, and of course there was a memorial service. Bush did almost exactly what Reagan did except he spoke earlier in the day on Saturday. Went to the Johnson Space Center as we did. Mrs. Reagan was there. I just think back to that.
I actually took a call that night, it was a call for the President. My job, you clear calls to put through. The White House operator will call and say, “We have so-and-so calling, what do you want to do with the call?” It was Christa McAuliffe’s father. This was late at night. This was about midnight or so, and he wanted to talk to the President, very upset. He was blaming the President for her loss. Of course, I couldn’t put the call through and didn’t put the call through, but I thought, I’ve got to talk to this man and convey as much as I can to him, how Ronald Reagan felt and how deeply sad and sorry he was for the loss of his daughter. We talked for about half an hour. I was just being berated about it, really the President was, but I was taking it, being the person on the phone.

This went on for a half an hour or so, and I thought, I’ve got to do more than I’m doing. I can only do so much, what can I do? I promised Mr. McAuliffe, I said, “I can’t get the President. I promise you I cannot get the President on the phone, I don’t want to mislead you, but we need to communicate more with you,” and I said, “Would you allow me to talk to some other people in the White House senior staff, Chief of Staff, and have you get another call back tonight yet? It cannot be the President.” He said, “That’s acceptable.”

He accepted that so I thought, Good. Now what do I do? Make Don Regan call him back? Don’s not going to want to do that, although he would do it if I asked him to do it. I started to think, God, there’s got to be somebody. I got the President’s operator on the line and I said, “I need somebody and I don’t know who. We can’t put that call through to the President, but somebody else needs to talk to this gentleman. I promised he would get another call back from somebody. Maybe somebody from NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], I don’t know.” She said, “Mr. Kuhn, there’s a help desk set up down at Cape Canaveral that’s handling these calls. Why can’t they handle it?” I said, “I don’t know, who is it?” She said, “It’s Shirley Green.” I said, “Shirley Green? That’s right, she’s the spokesperson for NASA. She worked very closely with Vice President Bush,” I said, “Get her on the phone.” Got her. Told her about it. She said, “Jim, don’t worry, we’ll handle it. We’ll talk to him.”

So I mean, I would stay up all night, he’s got to get a call back. She took care of it. That was just one of those situations where one person was very upset with President Reagan for what happened. Yes, that was a hard week. Let me say this—hard period, very hard period, went on for months. The thing—aside from that, aside from the space shuttle disaster and Reykjavik, aside from those two—the thing that was most amazing about Ronald Reagan is at the White House, the ups and downs were really hard for me and most people who worked there. Because when things were going great you’re sky high, and then you’ve got to come down. And when things aren’t going so great—once again, not the space shuttle, or not Reykjavik—just, you lost a major vote in the House, somebody is trashing, this, that, disagreement with France. Just whatever, things aren’t going well, policy failed. And you’re way down, you’re really down. Then you had to bet back up. So you had to come down when you’re up, you had to get back up when you were down.

Reagan, other than with Iceland and the space shuttle, or with Beirut, with the loss of 241 Marines, stayed on an even keel. He was able to control his emotions. He was amazing. I mean, we’re off the Richter scale and he’s right there in the middle. He just had such control, such self control. Unbelievable.
Knott: Even during Iran-Contra?

Kuhn: Oh yes. He asked me one day, he said, “Look at me. We’re walking down the colonnade. I said, “Yeah?” He said, “How do I look?” I said, “You look fine. Why?” He said, “I don’t look all dark and depressed the way the papers say I do?” I said, “No, you don’t.” He was fine throughout that whole thing.

I will tell you this, the day John Poindexter testified before the Senate, he did finally convey something. We were on Air Force One. We were getting ready to go somewhere for a day’s speech in the Midwest I believe, and we’re up in the stateroom there—it’s a private room on Air Force One—and talking. I was actually sitting across from him, we’re getting ready to take off. Mrs. Reagan was not on the trip. He said, “Jim, today”—and he crossed his fingers—“today is the day John Poindexter will clear me once and for all, that I wasn’t involved in this.” And as you recall, that’s what he said. “The buck stopped here, the President didn’t know.”

Now there are still those who will say, will prove that was absolutely the case, the President didn’t know. We know what the President did. In his way, he approved the arms sales to Iran, but in his mind that was justified because we had a way of dealing with moderates there in opening up Iran and trying to make headway in that area of the world with the Middle East. So he thought it was a step in the right direction. But at the same time he was driven by getting the hostages back. In his mind he couldn’t accept the fact that this was an arms for hostages deal. This was an opening with Iran, in dealing with a new element there and possible new leadership. If we got the hostages back because of it, then so be it. That’s the hard argument to make, because they got the arms, we got the hostages back. If it made more inroads with Iran, so be it. However, Reagan had absolutely no idea that from the arms sales, that money was being diverted to Central America, to the Contras. He had absolutely no idea. He was stunned when he found out.

In fact, he didn’t know—I talked about the ’86 election, we finished up in California. Who was running then, was it [Ed] Zschau running against [Alan] Cranston, or was it somebody else? It all runs together. Did Cranston even run again that year? I don’t recall.

Knott: That sounds right, Zschau-Cranston.

Kuhn: Was it? Okay. We wrapped up and we spent the weekend there. We’re getting on Air Force One out of LAX to get on and so one of the press—the press were always under the wing, there were press in the press area across the way and then under the wing is the press pool—and somebody shouted about an article from a Beirut magazine about Iran and funds being diverted. “What was that, Mr. President?” And he said, “I don’t know,” about funds being diverted. That was the beginning of it there, and then it just kind of unfolded quickly after that.

He, with Iran-Contra, going back to your question, I’m sorry. There was something else I wanted to say, your specific question was—?

Knott: I asked if you had seen him down during that time.
**Kuhn:** No, no. His belief system was always—and this was the pillar of his belief system—always disclose everything. Full disclosure. If there were any issues, any questions, concerns, problems, follow the policy of full disclosure, and things were disclosed very quickly. As soon as Ed Meese could get the information over that weekend, out it came. More and more it came out as we learned more about it. Of course, there are always going to be those who will be able to speculate. But no, he was fine throughout that whole thing. He was absolutely fine.

**Knott:** Even during the Don Regan resignation?

**Kuhn:** Well now, that was kind of hard for me, in that he couldn’t fire him. Nancy laid the groundwork for Don’s firing. Even though as I said, Don and I worked together, I thought he was fine, he worked hard, he was great to work with. Don was an old Irishman, very proud man. He had some issues with Nancy, you’ve heard the stories about him hanging up on her. He told me when he did, “I did something really bad, I hung up on the First Lady.” I said, “You what? You shouldn’t have done that, Don.” “I know, I did it.” Boy, that’s one way to get in trouble with Ronald Reagan.

But when something like that happens, somebody has to go. It had to be Don Regan and Don didn’t want to leave. You know the different ways you can do it in a democracy. One of the ways is to go to the media with it. Nancy wasn’t talking to the media about it, but people very close to Nancy, California friends, were talking to the media about why a change had to be made, why Don had to go. You would see stories in the *New York Times*, you’d see stories in the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal* everywhere, about the demise of Don Regan. Trying to prepare people, especially Don, for a change. Like, “Get the message, Don? Maybe you need to resign.” And he wouldn’t go.

It got to the point where there were some of us who talked to the President about it, too. The fact that at some point here, you’re going to probably have to make a change, Mr. President, and we know how hard that is for you to do. It was pretty awkward for me to do that, but it had to be done. He picked up right away with it. He made the comment, he said, “Jim, I know we’ve had some problems with Don.” I thought, *Boy this is interesting, I want to hear what he has to say on this.* And I said, “Well, do you have some specific things that you wanted to mention?” He said, “Well, I know that Don probably got into a couple of photos that maybe he shouldn’t have gotten into. I know when we have a situation here like this, usually there has to be some kind of a change and everything. But I think Don knows that he’s probably going to be stepping down here at some point in the not-too-distant future.” I said, “Well, that’s a concern, that it could be more distant than we want it to be. We want to be helpful, and you’ve got to continue to stay focused on it too, Mr. President.”

As you recall—I’m trying to think when that conversation—this wasn’t real close to when it actually happened, because it kind of dragged on.

**Knott:** The date he actually resigned was February 27, 1987.

**Kuhn:** In fact, I thought it was earlier in February. Was it February 27th?
Knott: According to our Reagan timeline, which is pretty accurate.

Kuhn: You’ve got it right. This was wearing thin between Mrs. Reagan and the President. I could tell you, we were walking to the helicopter in the fall, late summer, fall, and the stories had started to appear about Regan maybe leaving at some point, resigning because of Iran-Contra and problems and he has to accept the responsibility. Well, they asked Reagan on the way out, “Is Don Regan resigning or are you firing Don Regan?” And he said, “No.” Like everything’s hunky-dory. Well, that just blew Nancy’s strategy right out of the water.

We got to Camp David and a discussion took place at Camp David about that. It was a little bit heated, or somewhat heated, quite a bit actually for a brief period of time. In the end, when Don did finally give up and agreed to go, it wasn’t because of Reagan talking to him. Yes, it was public pressure, but the Vice President, as I think you know, volunteered to step in to be helpful. There was George Bush, always looking out for President Reagan’s best interests. He talked to him about it. He said, “I’ll be your go-between. I’ll do the shuttle diplomacy between you and Don Regan if I can be helpful.” That actually took place as it all unfolded, to work out the terms and how he would leave. Bush was talking to Reagan, he’d go down and see Regan, Bush would come back to see the President. Reagan couldn’t fire people. He just couldn’t fire people, and wouldn’t. Didn’t believe in doing it. Unless they did something absolutely, to the point where they had to be hauled off or something.

So Bush did this shuttle diplomacy route, and of course Deaver was involved and talked to Howard Baker about coming in and getting relations restored with Congress. It was all set to go. That Friday when it all unfolded, Regan had agreed on that Friday to go. It would be announced on Monday, the following Monday, and unfortunately CNN leaked it. Howard Baker’s daughter was a correspondent for CNN, Cynthia Baker, I guess. She probably had it and that’s how it leaked out.

That’s when Regan went off the Richter scale, did what Paul O’Neill did with President Bush here recently when he got fired. O’Neill agreed to go, but said—now if I have this right, they agreed or did he agree? I can’t remember. But they didn’t want to announce it until there was a replacement. O’Neill agreed to it but then was so upset, couldn’t control himself, sent a one-line or two-line very terse letter off to the President quite upset. Larry Lindsey sent a two-page, very complimentary, very upbeat communication to the President. O’Neill just couldn’t control himself. Blew everything up, was totally disloyal to the President, didn’t wait. Well Regan kind of lost it too, when it leaked. Said, “I’m out the door, thanks for nothing,” kind of thing. Just a very cold letter. So Reagan did feel badly about that. Wasn’t stung by it, wasn’t distraught or anything like that, but was unhappy the way it unfolded in the end, that Don blew out the way he did. But at least he was gone then. Not a bad way, but not a way you wanted it to.

But then in came Howard Baker. I have to tell you, that Friday afternoon—we did this secretly—we went up into the—Deaver being involved on the outside, with Baker, putting it all together. The President needed to formally ask Howard Baker to do it. Even though it was conveyed, “What about Howard Baker? Would he be acceptable?” and Reagan said yes, you’ve still got to ask him. Even though Baker agreed to do it with Deaver, the formal question has to come from the President.
Well, as Bush had worked everything out with Regan to leave on Monday, we were meeting with Howard Baker early in the afternoon—and [Paul] Laxalt was involved, too. We had like a 1:30 meeting up in the residence. We took the President out of the Oval Office, didn’t want to do it there, we didn’t want Howard coming to the Oval Office, did it in the residence. Brought him in the southeast gate, which was the least monitored gate by the press. It sometimes wasn’t monitored at all. Laxalt rode in with him in a White House car. I was in the diplomatic reception room there at the south entrance. The President was upstairs, and Laxalt comes, just charging out of the car like a colt that just broke out of the barn, like this is a very good day for us. There came Howard, kind of just dragging his feet behind. I knew Baker and he knew me, and he said, “Oh Jim, what am I doing, what am I doing?” I said, “Come on, you’re doing this because you believe in this President and he needs you. You’re coming with us and you’re doing the right thing, Howard.”

He went up, they met, he asked him to do it, the deal was done. I felt bad for Regan in the end, that it had to end the way it did, but Don hurt himself. Even Reagan mentioned Don a couple of times. It was his way of saying an ego got out of control but he didn’t say that, “jumping into photos.” There was this photo taken in Geneva where Gorbachev and Reagan were sitting on the couch together after dinner and Regan’s right between them, right between them, leaning over the back of the couch. That hurt him. Even Reagan remembered that, but would never say anything about it. The only reason he said that was because I was pushing him to start thinking about how to make Don go.

The other thing that hurt Don obviously was hanging up on Nancy Reagan, but there was a third thing that hurt him, hurt him a lot. Maybe it hurt him more than anything else. Don Regan had, at Merrill Lynch, personal security the whole time as a CEO. You know, when you’re a big CEO, you’re going to have a small security force. When he was Secretary of the Treasury, you’re the head of the Secret Service, that’s under Treasury as you know, he had Secret Service protection. When he came to the White House as Chief of Staff, he kept a Secret Service detail and the press didn’t like that. A lot of White House staff didn’t like it. It hurt him. It was very bad. You’re not the President, Don. You’re not the Vice President, and you’re not entitled to Secret Service any more. Get rid of your detail. He had Secret Service and that was very bad, when you put yourself on that kind of a pedestal.

But aside from that, Don worked hard for the President, believed in him and never really had his own agenda and was certainly good for me to work with, but then he was gone after two years, or two years and a month or two.

**Knott:** Shifting gears a little bit, can I get you to talk about some impressions that you had of President Reagan’s relationships he had with other heads of state? We talked a little bit about this at lunch, if we could get it on tape. I guess we’ll start with Margaret Thatcher if we could?

**Kuhn:** Yes, he thought the world of her, was very close to her and vice versa. They were together many, many times. Camp David twice, the White House, I don’t know, several times, over there I think at least a couple of times. But they were also together in other parts of the
world, for the G7 economic summits. So they were quite close. It was almost at one point to the point where Reagan was too nice, and I can give you an example.

We were meeting at Camp David. She was there in December of ’84 and then came back a couple of years later. It was a Saturday plenary session. Shultz was there, National Security Advisor, was it Regan or was it Baker, I can’t remember, and then their counterparts on the other side of the table. It was supposed to be a two-hour session or something. Reagan had his points that he needed to make in terms of the relationship, defense, economic trade, political, cultural, Soviet Union. But he thought so much of her, was so fond of her—I mean, she could talk. She could really go for a long time. She dominated the first half of that plenary session and he virtually got none of his points in. We had a break and I pulled him aside, went in the room and said, “Mr. President, we’re running out of time here. You’ve got a lot of material to cover and you haven’t done it yet. You’re going to have to take the ball here and really move. We’re going to run out of time.”

He said, “Well, Jim, you know how fond I am of Maggie. She’s a woman and she had a lot she wanted to say, and I just thought I would let her do that.” I said, “That’s fine, but Mr. President, you’ve got to jump in there.” He said, “No, no, no,” he said, “I will.” I said, “C’mon, Ron, you’ve got to get in the game.” But that’s how fond he was of her, and just let her go.

She was okay to deal with, but nothing from a staff point of view. You could say hello and she would say hello back, but not that personable. There were other heads of state, Brian Mulroney in Canada, Reagan, two Irishmen, very fond of one another, close, close relationship. I loved being around him. He’d come up, ask how you were, knew your name, asked how the family was, how things were going, put his arm around you. Just a wonderful man, delightful man.

Helmut Kohl, very personable also. Would speak to you in German and you’d speak through a translator, interpret back to him. You’d get to know these guys because you saw them so often. In fact, I remember when we were in West Berlin, when Reagan gave his speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate and Kohl introduced his family to him, and his son spoke perfect English. One son had been educated at Harvard, another one at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. Just a really neat family.

Prime Minister [Yasuhiro] Nakasone of Japan, a nice man but very reserved. Just quiet and a very nice man, but not as talkative as the others. Of course, then there was President Mitterand of France, François Mitterand, and I think most people know that they had just a business relationship, that there was not a warm friendship between President Reagan and President Mitterand. Just never was, just never really warmed up. There were a lot of policy differences with agricultural subsidies. Of course everybody remembers Mitterand wouldn’t let us fly, allow our fighter jets, planes, to fly over France when we bombed Libya. They had to fly around and add much more time to the trip.

When we were at summits, there was a protocol for heads of state arriving, whereby the most senior always arrived last and left first, because you’re the most senior. Let you go first and you don’t have to come first and wait for everybody else. You come in last, you leave first. Well, the way it had worked out, Thatcher was more senior because she’d been in office longer. She was
the most senior but Mitterrand came in right after Reagan. Not long after Reagan came in, Mitterrand came in. But Mitterrand would actually wait. He would actually delay his motorcade, it was obvious what he was doing. We went through this so many times, so that he could arrive after Reagan. He would not arrive when he was supposed to, just to be difficult sometimes. It was like he was standing behind a tree or something, waiting for Reagan to arrive and then his motorcade would pull up.

I don’t want to say it was an icy relationship, but we did have our differences with France, there’s no question about that, from a policy standpoint. The two never really developed anything close to what Reagan and Gorbachev developed. Talk about close, I mean nothing at the level of a Mulroney or Thatcher, Helmut Kohl or Nakasone. It was what it was, and you couldn’t change that.

**Knott:** You mentioned Jacques Chirac at lunch. I don’t know if you want to tell the story about that.

**Kuhn:** Oh yes. When Mitterrand was President, Chirac was Prime Minister. Prime Minister of France is a very limited role, but he was there for a meeting at the White House. It was a small plenary session in the Cabinet room. I recall afterwards that Chirac came into the Oval Office just to spend some brief time with the President alone. Photos were taken in the Oval Office and then it was just the two of them. I happened to be in there and was about to leave so they could spend some time together. And Chirac pulls a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and just lights up a cigarette in the Oval Office like it’s an everyday thing. I had never seen anybody smoke in the Oval Office before. At that time I don’t even think people were smoking in the West Wing. I think they had stopped that, staff-wise.

President Reagan wasn’t at all upset that he lit up, he was fine with that. His big concern was, what do we do for an ashtray? Like, *Jim, we’ve got to find*—he’s looking frantically and I’m looking because we want to be hospitable. We couldn’t find anything. Finally we found, there was a nice Herend dish on the coffee table that was there and never got used for anything. I thought, well, why not? We’re going to make this a practical piece now, and gave it to him. That Herend dish just became an ashtray. But it was funny, he just fired that cigarette up like—he didn’t offer Reagan one because he knew he didn’t smoke. That was an old fashioned thing to do in the old days.

**Knott:** You mentioned also at lunch the visit of Queen Elizabeth to the United States. I think it would be worth talking about that because you were delegated, you were given the assignment essentially to—

**Kuhn:** In 1982, the President and Mrs. Reagan made their first big overseas trip and it was to Europe. Of course they went to England, went to France, they went to Rome and they went to Germany. I think that was it. I was in the advance operation then, and when you’re in Rome you actually kind of do two countries because you do Italy and you do the Vatican. Those were my assignments. But most importantly, when Deaver was there the Brits had taken very good care of him. Of course Reagan saw Margaret Thatcher, they saw the Queen. The Queen had assigned someone like Deaver to take very good care of them while they were in London, to make sure
that he had all the information he needed, to escort him around and everything. The whole trip went very well for the Reagans also. Buckingham Palace really went out of the way for the Reagans and Deaver.

Deaver decided, when it was announced that she wanted to come to the United States, she’d go to the West Coast and make several stops in California. I think it was eleven stops, all the way from San Diego up to Seattle, most of them in California, all but Seattle in California. We would do something in return, that we would reciprocate and that the White House would oversee her trip and not the State Department protocol, which would always, always do that. Not just because of what they did for Deaver, but because of the special relationship, being our strongest ally, that it was a good thing to do and show them as much respect and hospitality as possible and make that trip go as well as it could possibly go.

So he decided that the White House advance office, which normally does the President, would be in charge of that trip. At the end of ’82 Deaver told Bill Henkel, the director of the advance office, that he was in charge, that he had to assign somebody to oversee the whole trip. Bill Henkel gave it to me, which I was taken aback about. Did not want to do it and told Bill Henkel that with all due respect to the Queen, I was there for the President, for Ronald Reagan, was there to do presidential advance and did not want to do the Queen’s trip. He said, “You have to. We’ve been assigned to do it and I want you to do it.” I said, “Bill, I went through the campaign because of Ronald Reagan. I’m doing this because of the man, not just because of the White House, it’s because of Ronald Reagan. I don’t want to do the Queen.” He said, “You’ve got to do this and I want you to do this for me.” And I agreed to do it.

In the end, it was the only real fun thing that I did at the White House, because when you work there, the undertakings, the pressure of the deadlines, the stress level is very high, always, and it’s not a fun place to work. A very important place to work, very fulfilling, the most fulfilling thing you can do in your life, but not fun. But doing the three-month assignment for the Queen was fun, because you didn’t have all the pressure. You didn’t have all the deadlines, because she’s not the head of government, she’s the head of state. It was all ceremonial and most of her traveling entourage was most delightful to be around, plus the Reagans were out there for part of that trip. They rendezvoused. The Queen and Prince Philip started out in San Diego, went to Palm Springs, to Long Beach, to L.A., to Santa Barbara, to San Francisco, to Sacramento, to Yosemite National Park and finishing up in Seattle. The Reagans saw the Queen and Prince Philip, Mrs. Reagan I think actually saw them in L.A. Then the President and Mrs. Reagan saw them in Santa Barbara and they went to the ranch.

The Reagans actually spent the night on the Britannia. The Britannia was in San Francisco, in the harbor docked there. The Reagans spent their anniversary in 1983, which would have been their 31st anniversary—they married in ’52, so, yes, 31st anniversary—spent the night on the Britannia with the Queen and Prince Philip for their anniversary. But it was interesting, that night, a point I want to make—there was a small dinner with the Reagans and the Queen and Prince Philip, a very exclusive dinner. I can’t remember who was there specifically. But after dinner, what the Brits always did was they then invited more people on for an after-dinner reception. The two big rooms on the Britannia were the dining room and the drawing room. So they might have had ten or 12 people for dinner in the dining room, but when dinner was over
and they were getting ready for the reception, they moved the dining room table out, it was all timed, more guests showed up and were checked onto the ship. You had a reception in the drawing room, reception in the dining room.

I think the Reagans were in the dining room and Prince Philip and the Queen were in the drawing room. The group then grew from like a dozen to maybe 80 people or something. It was all there. The interesting thing is, if you walked in the room where the Reagans were, the dining room, it was like a political reception. It was crammed with people, people hanging all over the President, Mrs. Reagan, and everything. You went into the drawing room where the Queen and Prince Philip were and there were just a small number of people there, people standing back, not knowing what to do, not knowing what to say. Just being very careful for fear of breaching protocol and doing something not appropriate, touching the Queen when they’re not supposed to, saying something that’s not appropriate. So they stayed away from them, but they’re hanging all over the Reagans, pulling his neck off trying to get to him, but being afraid of the Queen and Prince Philip. It was like night and day, the difference.

The rule is, you can touch the Queen. If she conveys her hand to you, if she reaches out to you, you shake her hand, you know that. Otherwise you’re supposed to not touch royalty. I know, you can say that, but that’s just the way it is. But I can give you an example of what happened to somebody—when Britannia came in on the Saturday, the first stop in 1983, into San Diego, and it docked, we had an arrival ceremony on the pier in San Diego. Well, Pete Wilson had been mayor of San Diego, but ran for the Senate and was elected in 1982 and had just been sworn in as the new Senator from California. Well, the deputy mayor was the acting mayor. He had run for a special election to become mayor. He made the fatal mistake, during the arrival ceremony, of reaching out and putting his hand on the Queen’s back, which she could not have cared less about, didn’t bother her one bit. Unfortunately, a lot of press saw that and wrote him up, and wrote him up, and he lost the election. They ran him into the ground and he lost.

**Knot:** I was wondering if we could get your assessments or your impressions of various Cabinet members and also your assessment of their relationship with President Reagan. You’ve talked about George Shultz, so I think we’ve exhausted that unless there’s anything else to add if you’d like. But what about Caspar Weinberger?

**Kuhn:** Dear man, very dear man. Long history with Reagan going back to Sacramento, in the Office of the Governor. As Shultz, he handled the press very well whenever he went on the Sunday talk shows. But he had the big responsibility of rebuilding our national defense and money came pouring in. I mean, the money was pouring in through Reagan’s leadership and the appropriations process on Capitol Hill, because of Reagan opening up the minds that he needed to open up, that we were in disrepair. That there really were planes that couldn’t fly, ships that couldn’t sail, we had the Soviet Union, the Cold War was continuing to escalate, that we had no choice but to rebuild national defense, which had fallen into disrepair. The money did get appropriated. It was budgeted by Reagan, it got appropriated. Reagan had enough support on the Hill to get the funding that was necessary, but it was pouring in so fast he could hardly spend it fast enough. Caspar Weinberger had that responsibility, new weapons systems. Did a tremendous job of getting that off the ground and getting it into place very quickly.
I have to tell you, I heard Reagan give speeches, many years, talking about planes that couldn’t fly because of lack of spare parts, ships that couldn’t sail, and tanks that couldn’t motor, and sometimes you hear it so often you kind of wonder, *Well how bad is it? You know, is it that bad?* Well, in 1981, and this was right after the Anwar Sadat assassination, we had major security problems. There was an event right after that and of course, going forward, we had major security problems, not only because of John Hinckley, but because of Sadat and measures that had to be taken. We went over to Williamsburg and Yorktown. It was for the bicentennial celebration of the battle of Yorktown. Big military ceremony where troops were marching and there was an actual re-enactment.

**Knott:** Mitterrand was there, too.

**Kuhn:** Mitterrand was there. We had a state dinner for him in Williamsburg. Thatcher didn’t come. She couldn’t come for some reason, she sent a representative. But in any event, we weren’t sure how we were going to bring the Reagans over, if we were going to bring them over on Marine One, the helicopter, or have them fly over in Air Force One. Well, if they flew over in Air Force One we were going to take them into Langley Air Force Base. I can’t remember if we had F-18s there, or F-16s or -17s, whatever they are, but I went over to meet with the base commander. There’s row after row after row of fighter planes lined up on the tarmac. Ninety-seven to be exact.

We’re driving around, he’s showing me the base in case we did bring Air Force One in. I said, “How many planes are out there?” He said, “Ninety-seven.” I said, “Boy, that’s impressive.” The base commander said, “Well, it may be, but we recently did a full-fledged drill to take all the planes out, and we could only get 38 of them started.” That’s how badly things were in disrepair. This was October of ’81. The money had not come in yet, the new money, the new appropriation, to get things back to where they needed to be. But I thought, *He’s right. All those years I’ve heard him say this, case in point is right here. It really was that bad.*

**Knott:** What about Edwin Meese? Impressions of Edwin Meese and his relationship with President Reagan. Was there anything that you saw?

**Kuhn:** The good thing about Ed was—there were probably, you can count them on one or two hands—Ronald Reagan was the same person walking out of the White House who walked in. Now, aside from your knowledge base—we all hope to get more knowledgeable every day—aside from an immense knowledge base that he built up from a personal standpoint, the same person who walked in walked out of that place. I can say that for Ed Meese also. He didn’t change.

Unfortunately most people do change having to work there. Not necessarily in an extreme way, but they’re impacted by it, they’re affected. Reagan, not in the least bit. Ed Meese, not in the least bit. Nice, in the Reagan class for being nice. Devoted. Note, once again, only one agenda, Reagan’s agenda. Very smart, very articulate. As counsellor I think he was very effective in the White House and as Attorney General was effective also. He was the one, even though Ed had run into a situation with Wedtech and it was never anything illegal or unethical, just a question of
whether business relationships, I guess, were appropriate or whatever. But Ed finally, when he got to the point where there was enough press, where he saw too much negative, that it wasn’t good for President Reagan, he left. He left just to clear the decks and then it was done, there was nothing to it.

I also have to commend Ed highly because it was he who got to the bottom of Iran-Contra in the very beginning, before the full congressional investigation was done. “What the hell is going on here? Who did what?” It was Ed who got Poindexter, [Oliver] North, and so on, to find out what is this about funding the Contras. Ed led that over that weekend, met with the President, and that’s when Poindexter resigned and North was fired shortly after that. But it was Ed’s leadership on behalf of the President that got all the information that we needed, and Reagan disclosed it all, disclosed everything Ed was able to ascertain over that weekend. So he deserves a lot of credit for that.

I see Ed a lot here, I don’t want to say a lot, see him from time to time here, just a delightful person. In fact, I was at a dinner party—this is the kind of guy he is. Nancy Reagan was here to get the Medal of Freedom last summer, in July. Fred Ryan, who worked at the White House, who’s chairman of the Board of Directors of the Reagan Library Foundation, had a dinner party for her and invited a cross-section of some people who worked for the Reagans. Some Capitol Hill people, some Senators were there, Congressmen, some White House staff, Andy Card was there, Chief of Staff who worked for the Reagans, Mitch Daniels, who worked for the Reagans was there, OMB director, others. It was a small group, 40-some people.

I was talking to Andy Card, I was actually talking to him about an issue and Ed Meese came up—and this is just the kind of guy he is, it just made you feel so good about yourself—he said, “I want to interrupt the White House Chief of Staff so that I can say hello to Jim Kuhn.” But that’s the kind of man he was. He just was a nice, nice person.

Go ahead, there were some others.

**Knott:** I was going to ask you about Jim Baker, both as Chief of Staff—

**Kuhn:** Jim was a great Chief of Staff. All business, all policy, but yet understood the political side, just a master at doing that job. Could shift gears from Israel to Capitol Hill. I mean, it could be a Middle East issue to some problem with a vote on Capitol Hill that could have been on the President’s economic recovery plan. Just had the ability to go into great depth on any domestic or foreign policy issue, but understood the political side. Served the President very, very well and did an outstanding job.

**Knott:** We’ve heard a lot of reports of the rift between the Meese, Nofziger, sort of older Reagan California crowd and Baker’s team.

**Kuhn:** Oh, yes.

**Knott:** Did you see that, is that accurate?
Kuhn: Well, I can only say this. I didn’t work in the West Wing. I didn’t see it first hand, but I knew about it. I don’t know if Lyn told you this or not, but I can give you a very good example of what happened. Lyn Nofziger had a woman who worked for him that Jim Baker fired. When the Chief of Staff fires at the White House, normally that means you’re history. Lyn stepped right in and brought her back, “Jim, you don’t fire any of my people.”

The other side of that, bigger than that, much bigger than that—that’s just a specific thing—I don’t think Lyn necessarily trusted Jim Baker. As I think I said earlier today, Lyn spent one year at the White House. He was there to ensure that the true Reaganites got good jobs and that Jim Baker didn’t put his people—and maybe even more importantly, moderates—into those jobs. “We want Reagan conservatives.” You can say that’s a redundancy, but that’s what Lyn wanted. I’m not saying Baker didn’t want it, but I don’t think Lyn trusted Jim to do that so he thought he had to be there. So there was consternation between the two of them, there’s no question about that. Two different belief systems. I don’t know, you’d have to ask Lyn this, and maybe you did, who Lyn would have put in there as Chief of Staff. Did you happen to ask him that?

Knott: I think he thought Ed Meese could have done it.

Kuhn: The problem was—and Nancy had a role in this too. Reagan being an arch conservative for decades—this is just my belief—that Reagan never, ever changed his core values or belief system or his strong convictions in what he felt and stood for. But yet I think he realized that when he ran that next to the last time, in ’79 and ’80, that you are running at large now and there is this sense of pragmatism that you have to keep in your mind from time to time. Never ever compromising your principles, your convictions, your belief system, but there’s nothing wrong with being maybe a little more open to some things in particular areas, to be a little more inclusive. I sensed that, I saw that with Reagan.

Nancy clearly wanted that with Jim Baker, where Jim Baker was more representative of a larger group, whereas Ed would have represented the right wing of the party. That would have been truly that and that wouldn’t have been enough, in her mind. I’m not saying she—she was part of this, but I’m going back to my point now about Reagan being pragmatic, felt that also and felt it was the best to open up and go to a Jim Baker versus an Ed Meese. But Ed played a major role, that Jim should have the Chief of Staff job from a pragmatic standpoint. That I think was a wise decision.

Knott: You talked quite a bit actually about Michael Deaver, so I don’t know whether there’s a lot left to say, but if there is perhaps you could.

Kuhn: Mike, I’ll say this. Mike wasn’t perfect. Any of us who worked around Mike, we knew him very well. We knew everything about Mike and he knew us. None of us was perfect, but there was nobody who knew the Reagans better than Mike. He really knew the Reagans and knew how to manage them and knew what they were best at. He didn’t get into the policy part of it as much. He was an expert communicator and he controlled the messaging. He knew when to put Reagan out and when not to put him out, and where to put him and where not to put him, and knew where Reagan was good and where he might not be good. I don’t even know where
Reagan wouldn’t be good; I thought he was great at everything. But he just knew how to manage the agenda and the schedule and the communications part of it.

He did it very effectively because he knew the Reagans’ strengths, he really knew their strengths. It’s just amazing how well he’d known them and how he was able to extract as much success out of that relationship as he did. Because you can do the wrong thing with people. Not everybody is comfortable with everything that’s available and possible so he was a real architect in that respect. Once again, I’m not really talking about from the policy—once the policy decision was made, all right, we’re going to have a tax cut. We’ve got to get the economy refueled and the best way to bring deficits down is get a stronger economy and have more revenue coming in. In the meantime, deficits are going to have to go up to rebuild our national defenses, to end the Cold War, but eventually that will end. Now sell it. And that’s what Deaver was good at, was selling the policy.

**Knott:** And Vice President George Herbert Walker Bush.

**Kuhn:** Yes, great guy, just wonderful.

**Knott:** Were you privy to those weekly lunches on occasion that the President had with Vice President Bush?

**Kuhn:** Yes, it was every Thursday, unless one of them wasn’t there. They did it every Thursday. I have to tell you, this was a private discussion that was taking place, they were close. It was ’88 and I walked in because we had to go and they were going a little bit longer, it was just time to go, we had to move on. I think we had to get in the motorcade and go somewhere to give a speech. They were talking, it was right before the convention in New Orleans. Bush was telling him about possible people he was going to choose to go on his ticket. I knew that and I just turned around and went right back out again, I thought, Oh, geez.

The Vice President’s sharp. He said, “Jim, come back in. You can hear this, don’t worry about it. I’m wrapping up anyhow.” He said, “I don’t know, [Jack] Kemp? No, not Kemp. I thought about it and I just—I don’t think so. I haven’t made a decision.” And that was that. But I want to tell you what happened then. That must have been three or four weeks before the convention, but I had read—and I’m going to get back to George Bush again—I had read all these names. They were all speculated upon, as you know, but in one article or op-ed piece or something I had read Dan Quayle, just one time. Dan Quayle? Where’s that guy coming from, where did he get Dan Quayle? I don’t even remember what paper it was in, but I didn’t think anything of it, because I’d seen 20 other names.

At the convention, we went down on a Sunday. The Reagans got into the hotel, they didn’t really do anything. We actually went out and had fun, the Reagans stayed in New Orleans. We did a couple of things the next day, some speeches, some of the caucuses I guess, state delegations. Then Reagan gave his speech on Monday night. But as you know, that was not Reagan’s convention, that was George Bush’s convention. We had to get in and get out so it could be George’s convention. We always referred to him as George. I mean, that’s the way it was.
So we timed it so that on Tuesday morning we would leave when Bush was coming in. We all met at the airport. We had three planes there. Mrs. Reagan split off, she had her plan, I don’t know where she was going. She went somewhere. Air Force One was there. We were getting on the plane and flying out to California to Point Lagoon Naval Air Station, to go to the ranch. Bush came in about the same time our motorcade arrived for us to get on the plane.

Well, the Reagans and the Bushes were going to rendezvous, just make brief remarks there at the airport in front of people and the press and handing off the convention to George Bush. It was his deal. The Bushes and Nancy were walking the President to the plane, so that he could get on and go. He’d get out of the way, we’d go first. Then Nancy went to her plane and left and the Bushes went into town. But on the way walking up to Air Force One, the press are under the wing, the press pool, 30 of them, expanded pool. Then you’ve got all kinds of press over in the roped-off area. They started screaming, “Mr. Vice President, Mr. Vice President, have you told the President who your running mate’s going to be?” No answer. They screamed again, and other people started, they all, five, six, seven people screaming. Finally, Barbara Bush said, “George, for God’s sakes, tell the President who it is.” Like, You should have told him. Why the hell didn’t you tell him?

I thought, Oh my God. I’m standing close by, halfway between the stairs and the nose of the plane where I’m not in camera range, but I’m close enough to monitor what’s going on. Really didn’t have anything to do other than just watching in case something, whatever, came up. You’re just there, but you’re out of the way. Well, when she said, “For God’s sake, George, tell him,” he grabbed Reagan and walked him right over to me, where I was. I thought, Oh my God, I’ve got to back up or I’m going to be part of this discussion. I kept backing up and he kept coming. Finally they stopped within ten feet of me, and the wing was just right toward me and he just said two words, “Dan Quayle.”

I thought, Oh my God, I can’t believe it. It’s Dan Quayle. Reagan got on the plane, we got up, pulled the stairs away. This is leading into another story now. We had eleven press on Air Force One, there were eleven press seats. Well, they’re going nuts now, they want to know. They’re demanding to know. So I got Marlin Fitzwater, Ken Duberstein was Chief of Staff then. Baker had just left. Duberstein stayed back at the convention, to go to the receptions and everything. So B. Oglesby, who was Deputy Chief of Staff, was on the plane as the number one. Marlin Fitzwater, press secretary was on. I thought, Oh boy. I’m going to stand right here outside—the President was in changing his clothes to get into casual clothes. I can count ten, nine, and they’re going to be coming up here frantically saying they’ve got to see the President. I didn’t even get to five and there they were. There’s B. and Marlin saying, “We’ve got to see the President, we’ve got to see the President.”

I said, “Well, he’s busy right now.” I thought, You’re not going to get in there until I talk to him. I said, “He’s tied up. I’ll let you know when he’s available.” And they looked at me. I said, “I’ll let you know when he’s available, okay?” And they said, “Okay, okay, all right.” So I thought, I’ve got to get in there and talk to him. He told the President. I know what Marlin and B., everybody, the press, wanted to know: Who was it? They wanted to be able to tell the press. They wanted the President’s authority. So I went in and sat down, we’re getting ready to take off, did take off. I said, “Look, there’s a real firestorm in the back there with the press.”
Reagan had his way of being really coy sometimes, like he didn’t know, but you knew he knew. People really thought he didn’t know and he normally always knew. Like, he’s out of touch, he didn’t know. He just did that, he liked doing that. I said, “There’s a real firestorm in the back with the press. They’re going crazy.” He said, “Oh really, what about?” I felt like saying, “You know what about.” I said, “Well, you know, everybody saw what George did back there, took you aside and told you who it was.” He said, “Yeah?” I didn’t tell him that I knew who it was, that I heard. It didn’t matter, I wasn’t going to say anything.

I said, “Now look, Marlin and B. want to come up here and talk to you in the worst way because the press are sending notes up. They’re screaming. They’ve got to tell the press something. But you’ve got to protect George here. You’ve got to protect the Vice President, because he’s going to announce it shortly. But he told you. I think Marlin and B. want you to tell them so that they can convey it to the press. That’s not fair to George because this is his announcement. So just keep that in mind, it’s not announced yet and won’t be for another hour or two.” I guess it was an hour and fifteen minutes later, an hour plus or minus later that they did it at their event. It might have been an hour and a half later, I don’t know. So I said, “Just remember that. If you tell them, you’ve got to make sure they don’t tell anybody.” Then I said, “I don’t know, you’re the President, you decide what you’re going to convey to them.”

He said, “Get them up here.” So I went back to get them and they came flying up, like, oh boy, we’re going to find out who it is. The President’s eating grapes there, real relaxed and everything. I’m in there with them, there’s the four of us. B. said, “You know, Mr. President, Marlin is getting all kinds of inquiries here. They saw the Vice President take you aside after they shouted questions about who his running mate was. They’re sending notes up to us asking who it is, what you were told. They’re shouting up to us.” Marlin then said, “Yes, Mr. President, we don’t know what to tell the press. We felt we’d better talk to you about it and see what you want to do.”

He sat there and ate more grapes and he said, “Uh-huh, uh-huh.” He wouldn’t say anything. Finally Marlin said, “Mr. President, did the Vice President tell you who his running mate is going to be?” And he said, “Yes, he did.” And that’s all he said. The President said, “What else?” Marlin and B. looked at one another like, Damn he’s not going to tell us, you know? He said, “Nothing else, Mr. President, that’s it. We just wanted to know if he told you.” He said, “Yep, he told me.” So they stormed out of there. They were pissed. They were just, they thought they were going to find out who it was and of course I didn’t tell them that I knew.

Knott: Sure.

Kuhn: They had to find out like everybody else. It was just interesting. That’s just a George Bush story. I can tell you one more George Bush story and this goes back to ’87, when I had two kids. My wife went to California, I think her grandmother had passed away and she took my son, who was like only one. In ’87, Caitlin was born in February of ’84, so Caitlin was just three years and three months or something. Not even three and a half. I had Caitlin at the White House with me, but a friend of ours was going to come by the White House to pick her up and take her with them for the day, and then I was going to get her that night. But I actually took her over,
carried her over and went over to get the President. He’d seen her at Camp David, knew who she was and she knew who the President was. And he was very good with the kids.

So we walked over and walked back with the President and then came out of the Oval Office and there’s the Vice President standing there. In fact, I think when I called they said he’s already on his way down. So I came out, and of course the Vice President’s great with kids, wonderful family, tons of grandkids and everything. I said, “Mr. Vice President, this is my daughter Caitlin, she’s three.” He made a big fuss over her and I asked Caitlin, “Caitlin, do you know who this man is?” She said, “Yes, he’s the pretend President.” I said, “Yes, I guess—” He laughed and he said, “That’s what I am. I’m the pretend President.” So, anyhow. A loyal man for eight years, just that whole time, not once, not once did he ever upstage, say or do anything that even came close to reflecting negatively on the President.

I was in the Oval Office in meetings at the times where Bush would step in. Normally, he would let the people there that had the agenda for the meetings continue. He wouldn’t try to charge in and say a lot unless he had something that had to be said. But there were times when he’d step in, he’d say, “Look, we’re being driven here by the policy. But the policy implications are going to reflect negatively on this man right here and he’s going to be hung out to dry with this policy. And he’s the reason we’re here.” You can be driven by the policy and you forget the rest of it. They would say, “Wait a minute, this is wrong. We’re going down the wrong path.” He was a big defender of Ronald Reagan’s. He did that, he stepped in and did a great job, was just outstanding.

Knott: I wonder if you would have anything else to add about Nancy Reagan. I mean, you’ve mentioned her quite a few times today. You said she could be difficult. I don’t know if you used the word “difficult.”

Kuhn: I said that she could ask questions that there were no answers to. I’ll give an example. It was Larry Speakes who helped me with this. Larry Speakes and I, the way it was set up, the press secretary and you sat beside one another on Air Force One. You sat beside one another on the helicopter, on Marine One. You’re in the same vehicle in the motorcade, which was the spare limo, which is the decoy limo. It’s there for a decoy but it’s also there in case the main limo breaks down. I was almost shaking my head ruefully, I said, “I don’t know if I’m doing a very good job.” He said, “What’s wrong?” I said, “As of late, I’m not prepared to answer Mrs. Reagan’s questions. It’s the funniest thing, I don’t know what it is. I mean, I know what we’re doing, but she’ll ask me things that I’m just not up to speed on or I just—” He said, “Jim, it’s not you. There are no answers to most of her questions.”

I’ll give you an example. She used to call, and this could be something about the weather. She always called about the weather forecast if we were going somewhere. What’s the weather, what’s the temperature. Is it raining, is it windy or whatever. You could say, “Well it’s this,” and you get it from the military, you get it from whomever. You have it written and give it to her. And she’d say, “Rain. Why is it raining? Why is it raining in Cleveland?” You’d feel like saying, “What do you mean?” I’d say, “Well, I guess there’s a low pressure system that came in. . . .” “Well, why?” I’d think, Oh God, I’m getting in deeper here.
Another time at Camp David, NBC was doing a special on the Reagans. They wanted to get some footage of them watching a movie at Camp David, which they did every Friday and Saturday night. They needed to go in and set up some lights, but it had to be very soft lighting because they wanted it to look dark on TV, but yet you had to be able to see the Reagans sitting there. My friend Mark Weinberg was with me too, the press person. We’re at the front door, the Aspen Cabin. You didn’t have to knock to go in there, it was just go in, but I guess we were getting ready to walk in and she saw us coming. She opened the door, it was real nice, and I said, “Oh, Mrs. Reagan, hi. I’ve got to talk to you about something.” It was like 5 o’clock in the afternoon Friday. I said, “Now, at 6 o’clock we need—” She said, “No, not at 6 o’clock.” I said, “Okay, but can I tell you what it was that I was going to say that we were going to try to do at 6 o’clock?” She said, “Oh, yes, what is it?” I said, “NBC wanted to set up some soft lighting so they can do their cutaway shots. They wondered if they could do it at 6 o’clock. I thought that was good.” She said, “Sure, 6 o’clock is fine.” But that was Nancy.

I mean, she could be short sometimes or whatever. But I don’t know that he would have been President without her. She wanted him to be President. He wanted to be President, but she had to push him. Reagan would have never been Governor if his kitchen cabinet had not twisted his arms to do it. People like Lyn Nofziger and William French Smith. I think you know who the group is, Holmes Tuttle and others. [Frank] Jorgenson and Bill Wilson and all these guys and everything. He would have never run, I don’t think, without them. I don’t know that he would have seriously run for President if not for Nancy nudging him and pushing him to do it.

Then, his success level. She just deserves, as I said earlier, so much credit for his success, because she kept us on track. Not that she got into policy affairs, like Hillary Clinton and having an office in the West Wing and sitting in on meetings. It was just guiding him to make sure we were going down the right path and when we had to switch gears or switch paths because it wasn’t working, it was she who would question the policy. “Why are we doing this?” Or, “Why aren’t we doing that?” Sometimes they could be very simple questions and once again, when the policy was driving it, everyone was so hung up on the policy aspect that they missed the human element. You’re missing the forest for the trees or the trees for the forest.

She was excellent, by asking good hard questions, how do we know, why, what if. She’d stop you in your tracks and you’d say, “You’re right, this has to be re-thought.” Or, “This has to be changed.” Or, “This has to be put on hold.” Constantly protecting him, constantly protecting him. She was his ultimate protector and just had such a role in making sure he was surrounded with good people. And when people had to go, that they got out. You’ve got to have a good staff. He talks about the shiny light and city on the hill—I mean, she was it, in my mind. She just deserves so much credit for all the good things that happened. She was behind the scenes, she was always behind the scenes, but she needed to be there. There have been past Presidents that would have been—and also Presidents in the not too recent past—who would have been much more successful if they’d had a Nancy Reagan behind them. There’s no question about it.

Knott: Let’s talk a bit about Ronald Reagan himself for the home stretch here. You mentioned at lunch that he had a particular absence of ego, with one exception. Would you be willing to share that story?
**Kuhn:** Yes, yes. As I said, he was the same man leaving the White House who walked in, other than a knowledge base that was enhanced. I mean any President, any CEO, any professor or any lobbyist, or any professor-to-be, you want to get smarter every day. With all the information that you have in front of you on a daily basis as President, that knowledge base just grows immensely. But aside from that, he was the same man, personally, who walked in, who left eight years later. Not impacted, not affected by the power, the prestige of that office, because he was just very low key, very unassuming, very self-effacing, a unique man.

He used to tell people near the end, people would come into the Oval Office, interviews that he did. Everybody said, “Are you going to be sad to leave, is it going to be hard to leave?” His answer was, “Coming into the White House as President, you know that you have temporary custody of this office and that you’re going to be leaving.” They would say, “Will you miss it?” And he said, “No. This has been wonderful doing this for this country but it’s time to go and I accept that. I’ll look back on it very significantly, but no. There is one thing that I will miss. I will miss Camp David. That was very special being able to go up there for the walks, the beauty of Camp David, the sereneness, riding horses up there. That is the one part that I will miss. And I’ll miss the people. But it’s time for me to go and I understand that.”

Ronald Reagan must have had a tremendous superego, which in my understanding is what keeps the ego in check. It was just unbelievable, because anybody else you would have thought would be impacted, but he wasn’t. We had an interesting situation one day that took place in the Oval Office about his prior career from Hollywood. Reagan talked a lot about Hollywood, about movies that he made. He was very proud of being an actor and was also proud of his athletic background, playing football in high school and college, at Eureka College. He got a question one day, a family came in Friday afternoon, friends of somebody at the White House, just to greet him, before he was to go up stairs to change clothes to go to Camp David. Trying to be nice, they were trying to build up his being President, and one woman, an older woman had said, “I saw a lot of your movies back in your Hollywood days. I just want you to know, I think you’re the best President I’ve ever witnessed running this country, but I never liked you as an actor.”

Knowing how proud Reagan was as an actor and athlete and never taking himself seriously as President—took the job very seriously, but never took himself personally seriously as being the President, but the Presidency was very important—I thought, *Gee, she said exactly the wrong thing.* She could have said, “You’re a mediocre President, but boy, were you ever a great actor.” That would have just made his day. She said exactly the wrong thing. You could see that he was stunned. He was almost frozen in his tracks, standing still. Feelings hurt, taken aback, totally stunned over that comment. I thought, *Boy, I want this to end. We’ll do the photos and the greetings and not make this a long session.* It worked out fine and they left. He was still very gracious, very gracious, but you could tell he was taken aback by that comment.

They walked out of the Oval Office, they closed the door, it’s just the two of us. Stood there by the desk, just frozen. I thought, *Boy, she really put it to him, she really hurt him.* It was the first time I’d ever seen his feelings really hurt. I went up to him and said, “Mr. President, you know how people are. They think being President is the only thing that matters in the whole world. That was her way of saying that you truly are a great President, and she was making a contrast to...
your being an actor.” He didn’t say anything back. He just kind of looked down at the floor, then at the window. I thought, Boy, this is bad. What are we going to do here?

I said, “You know, Mr. President, people make comments when they come into the Oval Office. Nobody has ever told you that before. She didn’t mean it that way, she just didn’t mean you were a bad actor. It was to reflect on your Presidency positively.” He still didn’t say anything and ten or 15 seconds later he finally said, “I’ve never had anybody tell me that before. Jim, that was the first time—nobody’s ever told me that they thought I was a bad actor.” I said, “I understand. I don’t think that she really meant it that way either, she was just making the contrast.” He said, “I just had never heard that before.”

So you could see, there was that side of him, very proud side, whether it was the ego from the acting part, which is fine. But it was amazing how he could make the distinction between that and being President. How do you do that? I don’t know how you do it but he was able to. He was able to separate the two. It was just amazing.

I’m trying to think if there’s anything else on Iran-Contra. This may be something that doesn’t relate. This may not be good for you to use but I want to say it if I could. Because of Poindexter and because of Oliver North and [Richard] Secord and others, Reagan will live with a scar, in my mind. You might even say deeply scarred over Iran-Contra—I wouldn’t say deeply, but there is a lasting scar that will be there on his Presidency because of that. It was interesting that Reagan had a hard time firing Oliver North. He still referred to him as a national hero even after he fired him. North later came out and once again, with regard to Iran-Contra, came out with his book and said that he had all these secret meetings with the President, with Reagan, Oval Office, up in the residence. I mentioned earlier how difficult it is to get up in the residence.

I thought, This can’t be. I just want you to know that Oliver North worked at the White House on the National Security Council for 28 months. There’s a record that’s kept of everybody who’s with the President, every phone call or virtually every phone call—oh, remind me, I want to tell you a phone story from Camp David. I might want to tell you two stories from Camp David. So a record is kept and we went back and researched it because we knew he was putting out misinformation. In 28 months, Oliver North had 18 meetings with the President. Twenty-eight months, 18 meetings. Over half of those, I think ten of them were in an auditorium in the Old Executive Office Building. Have you been in that?

Knott: No, I’ve seen pictures of it.

Kuhn: Two hundred and fifty people. Bush uses that, you’ve seen that. You can put 250 people in there. Almost 12 of them, ten or 12 of them, were with 200-plus people. Some of those sessions were with six or eight or ten people in the Oval Office, NSC briefings. A couple of times North came in with hostages that were released, like [David] Jacobson, I remember, was released from Beirut, Oliver North was with him. That’s fine, that was important, that was a very great day. But it’s just amazing how he said, “I was alone with the President.” He was never alone with the President.
Going back to Camp David and clearing calls. We had a clear callers list, where there were certain people who could call the President any time of the day, any day of the week. That was a very small group of people.

**Knott:** To be put right through?

**Kuhn:** Yes. For national security reasons they could get through, obviously. But even if it wasn’t national security, they could go through. What they did, the operators, like at Camp David or even if we were traveling—I wasn’t the only person who cleared calls at the White House—even if they were on the clear callers list and it wasn’t an emergency, they would say, “Can the President take this call? Do you want him to take this call? Should he return the call?” Of course, we’d always put it through unless we were in the middle of something. Unless, once again, it was an emergency, then we’d get him to the phone right away. But that was a very small list.

There were also those people who were close to the Reagans, like kitchen cabinet members, who may not have been on the clear callers list, but you knew, common sense, to put them through. One weekend at Camp David, Sunday afternoon, I got a call. We didn’t have cell phones then, we had pagers. But there were phones in boxes, nailed onto trees at Camp David so you didn’t have to go too far. I got a call from the Camp David operator, who got the call from the White House switchboard down here, saying that we had Bill Smith calling for the President. Of course, William French Smith—the Reagans called him Bill, we referred to him as William French Smith. I said, “Of course, put him through. The President’s back from riding. Connect them.”

Well, that night, after the movie, we were talking about the movie. Reagan said, “You know, I had an interesting discussion today with a gentleman from North Carolina about education, about excellence in education and merit pay and what we can do for teachers and how important they are. He actually had some good ideas. We talked for over half an hour, I think.” I started thinking, *How did that call get through? Reagan didn’t just call this guy.* I said, “This guy called you, Mr. President?” I never thought, there were a group of us there, the lead agent got to go to the movie, the military aide, the White House communications officer, trip officer, Nancy Reagan, myself. I said, “You didn’t call. This guy called you, obviously.” And he said, “Yes.” I said, “Do you remember his name?” He said, “Yes, it was a common name. Smith, I believe. In fact Bill, Bill Smith, I believe, from North Carolina.” I said, “Okay, interesting.” I didn’t say anything.

Everybody left, I went into the kitchen and got the White House operator on the line. I said, “Tell me, I cleared that call, Bill Smith. What town was that in North Carolina? Is it Rocky Mount or someplace, Rocky something? And his name is Bill Smith?” He said, “Yes, and you cleared it.” I sure did. I said, “Okay, thank you.”

Now here’s a guy. Of course, Reagan, no problem. Bill Smith is calling from North Carolina. Now, a lot of Presidents would have said, “How the hell did that guy get through to me?” Reagan was delighted to hear from him. But can you imagine what Bill Smith...? He calls the White House, he gets transferred to Camp David. The next thing you know, he’s got the President on the line. I wonder if he thought that’s how it works.
Knott: That’s great.

Kuhn: That was Bill Smith. Now what was the other Camp David—?

Knott: You said there was another Camp David story.

Kuhn: By the way, Margaret Thatcher, when she was up there, it was the first weekend at Camp David that I had gone up there by myself. She was there, it was December of ’84, but she went there to talk to him about Gorbachev. She had met Gorbachev, I believe, in Moscow before he had become General Secretary. Was it [Yuri Vladimirovich] Andropov or was it [Konstantin] Chernenko? Who was the last one?

Knott: The last one was Chernenko.

Kuhn: He was the heir apparent and Chernenko was not doing well healthwise. She said, “I want you to know, I think there’s something there with this man.” So even though Nancy Reagan had been working on it, Thatcher had an impact too, because she said, “There’s something with this man. He’s got a vision. He wants to see the world change and I think the two of you might be able to begin that process. You should think about this, Mr. President. There is something there with him.” So she had a big impact also. She told him that at Camp David.

I’m trying to think what that other story was. Was it a phone thing at Camp David? Was it ... what the devil was it? I’m trying to think. Nancy, movies, NBC, outside. Well, it’s totally out of my mind right now. I’m trying to think if there’s any other aspect of Reagan—let me say some general things here.

One of the things that Reagan didn’t like the most was the fact that—and he said it was two things. The one thing he said over and over again, and maybe you’ve heard this, to his staff, to his Cabinet, was, “Listen to the people. They know best. What they’re saying about our policies, listen to the people.” He said it over and over and over again for eight years, and how important it is. When Presidents don’t listen, I think it catches up with them. Reagan listened. It doesn’t mean you do everything, but you’ve got to take into consideration. He reminded his folks, “Listen to the people.”

The one thing that he said to me quite often was, “Jim, they’re telling me more than I need to know.” Now, you know Reagan wasn’t one who was always looking for stacks and stacks of paper. There have been Presidents who always wanted more and more background information. Reagan didn’t want that. He didn’t need that. He stayed with the big picture. He stayed with his agenda and he wanted to move that agenda forward. He knew what he wanted, he knew how he wanted it. He left it up to others as to how it was to unfold and he left the details up to others, but he knew what his policy decisions were. He had no self doubt about his policy decisions, whether it was education, whether it was energy, whether it was crime, whether it was healthcare, telecommunications policy, less regulation, or whether it was foreign policy. You know, two guiding principles there: end the Cold War, foster democracy. Then from a domestic standpoint, get the government off the backs of small business and corporations.
Now I realize you’ve got to have some regulations, you saw what happened. Not all regulation is bad, and Reagan wasn’t saying all regulation was bad. But he had his belief system in place, made the big decisions. This is where we want to go on tax reform, now let’s get there. That’s why you’re here, do it. Whereas a lot of Presidents have to study every detail about every phase of it. Reagan got a lot of that and he’d look and he’d say, “I don’t need to know all this. I know what I want, let’s just get it done.” So the constant thing was, “They’re telling me more than I need to know. They’re producing all this unnecessary paper that I’ll read, but I don’t think I really need to read because I already know.”

But he read everything, he read everything. So we were constantly trying to streamline things. You know, when the NSC would write some 80-page briefing document, it didn’t need to be 80 pages. Maybe it only needed to be 20, maybe it needed to be 50, but streamline, streamline. That’s effective leadership, it just is. Leave the details to others, delegate. Not only did he want the United States government to get out of the way of business, small business, corporations, but he wanted to get out of the way of people too. “I’ve got good people working for me, now let them do their jobs.”

Now he got criticized for being disengaged, but that’s not what it was. Reagan, time and time again, stood in front of large audiences at the podium, and when our economy came roaring back—and I want to tell a couple of things here about 1982—he never took credit for it. In fact, he said in front of audiences, “We’ve got an economy that’s been growing now for—” I don’t know, ten months, 20 months, 30 months, 40 months, 60 months. He said, “Look, we didn’t do it. The federal government, we the government, just got out of their way of the American people is what we did. You did it.” There’s something to be said for that, there really is.

You know, in 1982, it was hard for me, because he’d been President for almost two years and this is the off-year elections again. But the economy had not come back yet because it was in such bad shape. Still high unemployment, the prime had come down, inflation was starting to come down, but still a lot of high unemployment. Reagan wanted to go out and campaign for various Republican candidates, House members, Governors, Senators. There were states that said, “We don’t want Reagan in here because the economy is too bad and he’ll be a drain on us. It’ll be more negative than positive.” I remember there was some of that, not a lot of it. But it was so hard to comprehend, to hear that from these people. The economy had just not come back yet, it was in such sorry shape it just took time. It did come back, as you know. It came roaring back.

I remember, I had done an advance stop in Casper, Wyoming. We did a campaign stop for then-Senator Malcolm Wallop from Wyoming. We certainly wouldn’t force our way into a state. If somebody said they didn’t want him in, we wouldn’t have gone. But it was interesting, we did a campaign rally at the airport there. It’s a great stop, good campaign stop. I remember, Air Force One went on to Billings, Montana. I got on the plane and flew back to Washington. Sam Donaldson had peeled off to file a story and he was interviewing Senator Wallop on the tarmac. I was listening as Air Force One was taking off. I remember Senator Wallop saying something that was upsetting. He said, “Gee, you took a chance here having a President coming in with the economy that’s not doing good, with an unpopular President right now because of the economic situation.” I remember what Wallop said, and it just made my blood boil. He said, “They asked
me if they could come in and campaign for me. I didn’t ask them.” But that’s what we were living with in 1982.

At the same time, Bob Michel, who was the minority leader of the House of Representatives— and by the way, Bob Michel had the worst political timing. He came in the House in 1954 as a freshman Congressman. You know what I’m going to say, he left in 1994. Forty years of domination by the Democrats. He retired the year the Republicans won. He would have been Speaker. It’s not a given but I think it was understood he was going to be Speaker. They actually made him Speaker for a day, I guess, the Democrats did. But Bob Michel was in huge political trouble in 1982 because in Peoria you had the long strike with Caterpillar. You had various companies that had moved out. The unions at UAW [United Auto Workers] had put up a strong candidate and the unions were really supporting him strongly financially and everything. Michel was in a race for his life. I want to tell you this advance story. It was difficult but it was what we were up against.

He was in a race for his life, it was dead even. If you’re the incumbent and you’re even, that’s not good. Most times, it would translate into you losing. On top of that, he asked Reagan to come in and do a stop. Bob Michel, God bless him, said, “I need you to come in to my district. Will you come in?” Of course Reagan said yes. In addition to everything that I just said, they had planned this event. There’s a coliseum in Peoria where they had like a minor league hockey team. It had a lot of seats, 12,000-seat coliseum. They were doing the event in a 12,000-seat coliseum. Now, you know advance guys don’t like to go into those things, because you’ve got to fill all the seats. On top of that, they were selling tickets to the political rally. Selling tickets, to make money.

And to make matters worse—and I got stuck doing the stop. I’d heard about that, I thought, I feel sorry for the poor son-of-a-gun who’s got to go there, and I got it. I got it because Bill Henkel said, “Bob Michel’s Chief of Staff, Ralph Vinovich, is an SOB like you’ve never seen before. I can’t deal with him, I don’t want to send the other guys in. You’re going to have to go work with him, Jim. You’ll find a way, you’ve got to do it.” I thought, Thanks. You send me in to a situation where there are 12,000 seats, selling, Michel might lose, we’ve got Ralph Vinovich, who’s going to be very difficult to work with—and I’m being very polite, I’m cleaning up what he said obviously. This doesn’t look good. So I go to Peoria.

First thing, you look at that coliseum, you stand there wondering, How do we fill these seats? We’ve got an 8 o’clock at night on a Wednesday night, a school night, selling seats, and the World Series had already started. Milwaukee was playing St. Louis. And I’d looked at the map, Peoria is about halfway in between. I started looking around there. I said, “Are there baseball fans in this town?” And they said, “Yeah, half are for St. Louis and half are for Milwaukee.” I thought, The way this thing’s going—I then started checking. If there’s a seventh game, what night would it be? Wednesday night at 8 o’clock. It did go seven games.

I tried and tried and tried. There was an exhibit hall where, once again, like I described at the East Texas State Fair, where you could bring in 5,000 people. Maybe cram in more, but you could make it look good with 3,000. I thought, That’s where we’ve got to do it. I couldn’t convince Vinovich and the committee to do it. Then Vinovich and I kind of developed a
chemistry, and I said, “Look, you guys, we all believe you’re going to win. Ronald Reagan wants to help you win. But if we screw up this event and we have 5,000 people and you’ve got 7,000 seats, we lost the election for you. That could lose it. You can’t do that to your man Bob Michel.” The committee kept fighting me, his committee, but Vinovich started to listen then.

He said, “Will you talk to Bob Michel about it? He may be the problem in the end, I don’t think he wants to move it. He knows your concerns.” So Michel was there campaigning, Congress had adjourned. In a horrible mood. He’s a nice man, but he was in a horrible mood because he thought he was going to lose. He’s running for his life. I said, “Look, we can help you, but the way you’ve got this structured, we’re going to hurt you. You can’t take that chance. We’ve got a bad event, Ronald Reagan could cost you to lose that election if we don’t fill those seats. I don’t see how we do it, 12,000 seats, school night, World Series could go seven games, you’re selling tickets. It’s a formula for disaster.”

He said, “All right, Jim, you’re in charge. You do what you have to do to make it right.” Thank God, we’re out of there. I got it moved out. I mean, it was a nightmare, just a nightmare. So we got into the exhibit hall. But then, of course, tickets started to sell. Then it looked like, Are we going to get everybody in? Then the fire marshal stepped in and said, “We only should allow so many people in here.” He wanted to cut it back to 3,500 or something, and it looked like we were going to build towards 5,000. I thought, My God, now what are we going to do? We can’t go back into that coliseum. And you’ve got to be careful with fire marshals and everything.

I talked to the mayor and the mayor was a staunch Republican. I said, “We’ve got a problem, mayor. We want to do what’s right, we want to do what the fire marshal says. What is the limit for this room? I don’t think he knows.” And it was set higher. I think it went to 5,500 or something. We ended up with close to 6,000 people and they let them in. But then they shut it off, the fire marshals did shut it off. We had about 25 people who bought tickets who didn’t get in because of the fire marshals. Michel’s committee was really upset with me about that. I said, “Letters go from the President, apologizing, whatever it takes.” But we had 25 who didn’t get in, which we felt bad about. But at the same time we had a great event. That’s the art of doing advance work.

I wanted to also tell you that because of Ronald Reagan’s high popularity in the beginning, in the end—the middle, in ’82, he wasn’t so popular. I’ll think of that other phone story at Camp David. In fact, I’m going to think of a bunch of things that I’ll want to tell you when you leave here today. I’m not ready to finish unless you’re ready to finish. If you have more questions, I’m fully prepared to answer them, but I’m going to think of other things that I may want to convey to you.

Knott: That will be great. You can add it to the transcript or you can send it in any form. I wanted to ask you about Reagan himself. We keep hearing these reports of a kind of distance and this sort of wall that no one really was able to penetrate, perhaps not even Nancy Reagan. Did you see this? Did you see this sort of privacy, this desire for privacy?

Kuhn: Yes I did. I think he was a shy man. Now Deaver may not agree with that, but that’s my belief. I think he was private. He liked his privacy, he liked to do things alone. He liked to read,
he liked to write. He didn’t waste time. He was always working, doing things. But he enjoyed that private time. Ronald Reagan was not a politician. He wasn’t out always looking for a crowd of people to glad-hand with. He much preferred to be with a book, to be answering letters, to be writing speeches, to be formulating policy decisions. That’s what he liked doing. He spent a lot of time with himself. He knew himself very well. Whereas with a lot of people, they’ve got to be out with people. His preference was not to be.

Now, that didn’t mean that he didn’t like people. When he was with people he was excellent. I will say this, you could put him in a room with five or six people and because of his shyness, he wasn’t always real good in small groups. You put him in front of a billion people, there’s nobody better in this world in my mind, bigger than life. But if you threw him into a room and said, “Go entertain those people. They want to see you,” he wouldn’t know how to—there he was, President of the United States. He didn’t always know what to say or do because he was shy. He didn’t want to come on like, “Hey, I’m President Reagan.” He just went in there and would say hello, would say hi, would smile and be nice, but he didn’t always know what to say.

Knott: Would this happen on occasion where you might have a small group coming into the Oval Office for a brief visit for whatever reason, and there would be that kind of awkwardness?

Kuhn: Yes, yes. I wouldn’t call it awkwardness. I guess it was awkwardness, just a quiet period. Most people when they came in had something they needed to say to him, because they were coming in for a reason, a meeting. Even for stand-up photo ops, a presentation of something that they could take home to their state or hometown newspaper or whatever. Or they wanted to give him something or they had to convey something to him. We did those things because we believed—you can’t get everybody in the Oval Office—but you still bring members of Congress in and heads of state. So you try to do a good cross-section and be as representative and inclusive as you could be.

Where it became awkward was if you brought somebody in who just wanted to say hello. We’re friends, you want to meet the President, I bring you in. Or his staff brings family in or whatever. You couldn’t leave it to him to drive the discussion because he didn’t want to be that forward. Like, “Well, I know who you are and you’re from Chicago. Let me tell you about my days in Chicago.” That wasn’t his nature, it just wasn’t his nature to do that. I think he felt like he was prevailing on people by doing it. “I’ll tell you about my experiences in your state,” or, “And I’ll tell you a couple of stories about this or that.” He respected people too much to do that. It was their time to be with him and so I think he honored that. Like, “You go ahead, you say. It’s your time.”

You could evoke a response out of him. I used to tip people off, people I knew, and say, “Now look, don’t go in there thinking that he’s going to entertain you, because he’s kind of shy That’s not his nature. If he has a meeting and he’s got to make a point with a Senator or Congressman or head of state, he’s going to charge ahead. Otherwise, he’s going to respect you and it’s your time. You say what you want, he’ll love being with you, but don’t think that he’s going to drive the discussion.”
So I said, “Therefore, you’ve got to ask him questions. You can get him going. Ask him about the ranch, ask him anything about the ranch. Ask him how many horses, how many acres it is. He’ll start rolling and he’ll go for 15 minutes and I’ll have to cut it off.” I said, “Ask him about Camp David. Then you can really get a nice dialogue on. He’ll go too long and then I’ll have to break it up.” You could evoke that out of him, but he just didn’t assume like, “Hey, want to hear about my ranch? Want to hear what I did this weekend? Want to hear about my trip to Moscow?” He didn’t do that to people, he respected them too much to think that they wanted to hear it. Of course, they wanted to hear anything they could from him. They just wanted to be with him.

**Knott:** You may not feel comfortable answering this question, so feel free not to, but reports of a kind of distance between him and his children. Did you ever see him interacting with family?

**Kuhn:** There is no question that it was an unorthodox situation with the family. That was a very sensitive situation. I don’t know why, I guess you can look back and with the first marriage. One thing that we never asked about, that you just didn’t do, you never mentioned the name Jane Wyman to Ronald Reagan. I mean, why would you? You just wouldn’t do that. I wouldn’t do it to you as Professor Knott or President Reagan. But you knew it, you saw it. You had Mike, who was adopted by Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman. They had Maureen, their daughter. But then the divorce and then the two kids, with Patti and Ron. So you had that real split there. I mean, all the kids are different, we know that in any family. But they’re very different in the Reagan family and there was never really a coming together.

In the campaign in 1980, Mike was out there campaigning hard, Maureen was campaigning hard. I got to know both of them through the 13 months of campaigning. The only time we saw Patti was at the convention. She walked in, the first night Mrs. Reagan went in by herself to watch the convention. That was the night Mrs. Reagan went into a full house and fell down and disappeared. *Saturday Night Live* actually did a stunt on this, where you walk in and you’re waving. When she fell, she fell down, she was sitting in a coliseum seat. Well, she disappeared. I mean, she went all the way down and just dropped out of sight.

**Knott:** I don’t remember that.

**Kuhn:** Then she picked herself back up and reappeared and everybody cheered again. She didn’t stage it, she fell down. She was such a thin—when the wind blew too hard you had to go grab her, the wind was going to blow her down. But Patti was there for that and that’s the only time I saw Patti, I think. They announced him into—this is the Joe Louis Arena, the hockey arena in Detroit—and I remember, I had to push Patti to go in. “Follow your mother, please.” Never saw her again. Ron I got to know. He didn’t campaign much, but a nice guy. But it was just a real unusual situation. It just was.

It’s just the case. It was said to me after the Reagans left and the Bushes were in the White House, former President Bush. Once the Reagans were gone, a couple of times, three or four times, it was said that it’s different now because the Bush family is a great family, just an outstanding, close family. But it was mentioned that, gee, they were now going to things at the White House and they really never were invited that much in the Reagan White House. I never really explained it. I’d just say, “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” and let it go, but it just exacerbated the
problems. You had the Bush family there for everything, the outstanding family, and the Reagan family wasn’t there. It didn’t work and Nancy knew that. That’s why they weren’t invited.

Yes, it was an unbelievable contrast and it just highlighted that contrast. It was just a very unusual situation. I think Nancy tried to work with that on an individual basis. She was always close to Maureen. Well, maybe not always, but was close to her there. Maureen lived in the White House the second term when she was co-chair of the Republican National Committee. Mike, I think—you know, Mike was Mike and he was around and wasn’t around. They actually had a family feud there, right after the election in ’84. They were sparring in the papers. I don’t know what, I can’t remember what set it off, but for a couple of weeks Mike would be asked questions about, what about this, what about that? “Well, I don’t know, you’d have to ask my mother. We’re not talking.” She would say something, “We are talking.” They’re having this fight in the paper, in the *Washington Post*.

I remember, it was after the election. It was Christmas. The Reagans always did Christmas at the White House, Christmas Eve at the [Charles] Wicks’ here in Washington. Christmas Day at the White House. They would leave on the 26th to go to California. That was ’84. I flew out with them on the plane and I was taking my new job then. I was still in the advance office, but transitioning out. Dave Fischer actually left officially in April but I’d been over there essentially full-time from the beginning of the year, or for March and April I guess.

On that trip it was decided that Mike and his family would come over to the hotel. They’d call a truce and they would get together with the President and Mrs. Reagan. All of a sudden, that was like the big press deal. The press were reporting it, that there was this coming together, making too big of a deal out of something they shouldn’t have. It was a family matter. Well, Mrs. Reagan kept calling me and saying, “Now, Jim, do you have this worked out for Mike to come in so he doesn’t have to talk to the press on the way in?” I said, “We’re bringing him in a way that nobody’s ever come in before.” Well, the press had everything staked out at the Century Plaza Hotel. They got him coming in. You couldn’t drive by the press, you had to stop the car. He was going in the back way into the garage and rolled down the window to talk to them. Of course, Mrs. Reagan’s got the TV on, she sees it live. I get a call from Mrs. Reagan. “I thought we had it covered, Mrs. Reagan. They’re out there everywhere.”

They spent about three hours together, two or three hours. It was a long session. They didn’t have dinner and I don’t think the President had met his granddaughter yet. I think she was almost two. I think that was one of the first things—he may have seen her as an infant, but it had been a long time and she was two then. But then it worked out in the end. I mean, they came to the inaugural and there was a coming together again.

Then Patti was Patti and Patti didn’t want to be part of it. She didn’t want to be around the White House. Ron didn’t really want to be around the White House or the Presidency, although Ron was in Geneva. He was there in his red jumpsuit. He was just a little unorthodox but a clever guy, smart guy, nice guy. But he kind of faded in and faded out, came in and came out, came out. It just depended. But it was unorthodox, no question.
Knott: You were there during the period that Edmund Morris was given access for the authorized biography.

Kuhn: Yes.

Knott: Have you read the biography? Do you have any reflections on either—?

Kuhn: Well, I’m being very stubborn. I refused to read it and I need to read it. Many people said you’re making a mistake. I guess eventually I will. I still haven’t calmed down enough, I guess. But yes, we gave him access. We gave him too much access. Then we cut back on the access and he said, “Why? Why do I deserve this?” So then we had to kind of ease him back in again. Bottom line is, in the end, he had unbelievable access to the President. When I say we gave him too much—[tape cuts off]