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Interview with Thomas Wolf, December 29, 1994 & August 9, 1995

Thomas Wolf

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Interview Participants

Interviewee: Thomas Wolf, World War II Veteran and Government Official
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Interview with Thomas Wolf, December 29, 1994 & August 9, 1995

Description
Thomas Wolf was interviewed on December 29, 1994 & August 9, 1995 by Michael J. Birkner & David Hedrick about his service in World War II and involvement in the Nixon administration. He discusses his role in the Air Force Counterintelligence Corps during World War II, and his work with several government agencies, such as the Citizens of Eisenhower and the Office of Economic Opportunity. Wolf also describes the Watergate Scandal and his participation in the trial.

Length of Interview: 92 Minutes (Part 1), 47 Minutes (Part 2)

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Keywords

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Wolf: I was born in Hamburg, Germany, at home, on August 23, 1927 as an American citizen, because both my parents were American citizens, living in Germany at that time. My father was originally born in Germany, but came to the United States in 1912, spent the war there, and became a citizen in 1918. In 1922, while representing American Insurance businesses in Germany -- he was a marine underwriter and all the large ships were being built in Hamburg at that time -- he met and married my mother, also a German. She became an American through marriage. I had a German nanny and learned German before or simultaneously with English, which explains why I still have a slight accent... can't say “r’s” real well.

My father died when I was six, in 1934, and since he had wanted me to be educated in the United States, my mother started the moving process immediately. Unfortunately, my mother lost her American citizenship when my father died (long story, not pertinent), which necessitated her immigrating -- a long, complicated, and very expensive process at that time because of the Hitler regime. We finally made it to New York, where my father (and mother, to a lesser degree) had many friends, in December 1936. We settled into an apartment in a new high rise at 205 East 78th Street in New York City, where my mother lived for 55 years until her death in 1991 at 95.

(End of new portion, written by Tom Wolfe)

Wolf: [from tape recording, in progress, with Michael Birkner] I went to Hunter Model School, which was an experimental school run by Hunter College, for a couple of years, and then was sent away to boarding school. First I went to Indian Mountain School, in Lakeville,
Connecticut, at the age of 11, in 1938, and spent two and a half years there, graduating in 1941. I then went to Berkshire School in Sheffield, Massachusetts, where I normally would have stayed four calendar years, but because of the war I completed four school years in three calendar years, and then went on to Princeton University in the fall of 1944, where I completed a year and a half -- again, by accelerating -- before I got called to active service in the Army Air Force. I had volunteered as an aviation cadet; I had learned how to fly while I was at Berkshire, as all my classmates had, in a unique program that was started during the war to teach prep-school kids how to prepare themselves for the cadet program in the Air Force. I think maybe Berkshire was the only school that had a cadet program, and it got a lot of publicity in *Time* magazine and other places. And I then completed a year and a half at Princeton before I went into active service in September of 1945 and was almost immediately, after basic training in December, sent to Germany, where I was transferred from the normal ground forces to the Air Force Counterintelligence Corps because of my ability to speak German, which I had retained from birth.

Birkner: Which was a great asset.

Wolf: Yeah. It was. I can thank my mother for that. She insisted on speaking German with me whenever I came home from boarding school, and during the war, when she used to do this on buses and in the subway, I wanted to kill her, I was so embarrassed, but now I'm kind of glad she persisted, because I'm still fluent. Anyway, at that time it allowed counterintelligence people who had been over in Germany for five or six years and were ready to come home, to come back -- the fact that they found some of us young fellows who could replace them. And I was only in Germany a little over a year, because at the end of a year, the government decided they only
wanted regular army people, they didn’t want part-time army volunteers or whatever they called us. I think we were called Army of the USA, and they wanted regular people in. They asked me to sign up for a three-year hitch, and I didn’t want to do that, so I came back, and I was back at Princeton in February or March of 1947 and then graduated with the class of 1948, but I actually graduated in June '49. During the war years, as you know, students graduated as much as eight years from the time they started. But at Princeton, we retained the numeral of the class year we entered with, 1948 in my case.

Birkner: So you had a kind of truncated experience at Princeton. Let me ask you, did they give you a normal honorable discharge even though you don’t stay the full two or three years in the armed forces because of the situation you described?

Wolf: Oh yes, I have an honorable discharge. Not only that, but I got the GI Bill of Rights and when I came out, the last two and a half years at Princeton were paid for by the government, and I got a $25 monthly allowance besides. I was an English major. Before I went into the service, I was taught by some great professors who were waiting to retire. They are famous because they were called “Woodrow Wilson’s Preceptor Guys.” I had Dean Christian Gauss, Lawrence Thompson, Willard Thorp, Carlos Baker, Walter Phelps (Buzzer) Hall, and many others.

Birkner: You had the big names.

Wolf: I had every one of those for my teacher. Carlos Baker was my freshman adviser. Alan Downer was my thesis adviser. The other names I mentioned would all be familiar to anyone who’s up on the history of Wilson at Princeton.

Birkner: Sure, oh those are. . .

Wolf: I was very lucky they all stayed on, because the younger professors all went off to war,
and then when I came back in ‘47, they had all retired. Now the young professors had come back, had been discharged, separated and come back. It was a very exciting time at Princeton. The first black student entered Princeton in my class, ‘48. They became eligible because they had participated in the Navy’s V-5 and V-12 program, which was operated at Princeton (and many other colleges and universities) during the war. Pete Wilson and Jim Ward were the first two, and although there had been some blacks at Princeton during Reconstruction days, there had not been any since. And that’s the historical point.

Birkner: It’s very interesting. What was the most noteworthy experience you had while you were at Princeton?

Wolf: Nobody’s ever asked me that, and uh. . .

Birkner: What do you remember most?

Wolf: Well, I think Carlos Baker and Dean Jeremiah Finch and my ability to have relationships with them, and Alan Downer, my thesis adviser. I guess I’d have to say that I met my best friends (to this day) after I came back from the service. My best man and two of my ushers were people who I met at Princeton during that period, and they are good friends to this day.

Birkner: That’s meaningful.

Wolf: I’ve talked to all three of those people I just mentioned within the last week.

Birkner: That’s very meaningful.

Wolf: Princeton also gave me the entree to marry my wife, although I didn’t meet my wife until after I graduated from Princeton, but when I met her, I met her because of Princeton. When she took me home, I didn’t think her father would have allowed me to marry her. He was a Princetonian, class of ‘14, and her brother was class of ‘50, and she always tells me that that’s
the first time he ever put the newspaper down and talked to one of her dates when she brought me home. They were from Bloomington, Indiana. . . her name was Marian Gregory. . . and we’ve been married 43 and a half years now (1994).

Birkner: Well, that’s a very interesting story, and it’s an interesting coincidence. I assume, then, it was a coincidence that she had this Princeton connection?

Wolf: What happened was, that after I left Princeton, I went on R.H. Macy’s executive training program, and on the first day all the new trainees -- there were 30 of us -- met and sat around a table, and we each told our name and where we’d gone to college. And this young lady came up to me after the meeting and said, “You went to Princeton?” And I said, “Yes, I did,” and she said, “Do you know my brother?” And I said, “What’s his name?” And she told me his name and his class, and I did not know her brother, but I got to know her, and two years later we got married.

Birkner: That’s a very nice story. Tom, I want to leave it up to you to tell me what you want to tell me about your career in the private sector for many years, but I think what we’re ultimately trending toward is an understanding of your interest in politics and how you first got involved in politics, so however you want to handle that . .

Wolf: I want to spend very little time on my early career. I spent three years at Macy’s on the executive training program and as assistant buyer. Then, in 1952 -- February of ‘52 -- I went to work for a direct mail firm called Hodes Daniel [hereafter known as HD] which was owned by the father of my next-door neighbor from Princeton, who had become one of my very good friends; he was an usher at our wedding. They had a little mail house and printed letters and brochures for people, and they also had an envelope which was used by colleges and politicians
to raise funds. It was called a Triple-Duty Envelope; it was one of these envelopes that you send out, and then you tear it open, read the message, you put your money in the bottom part of the envelope and send it back. In February of 1952, an organization called Young Industry for Eisenhower -- YIFE -- was formed. This was right after I had joined HD. It was founded by Stan Rumbough, whom I knew socially from the church we belonged to, who at the time was married to Dina Merrill, the actress. And Stan Rumbough was also very socially prominent. He was the son of Mrs. E.F. Hutton, and Dina Merrill was the daughter of Mrs. Merriweather Post, so they were what you call a real power couple. The other founder of YIFE was a fellow by the name of Charlie Willis, who owned an aircraft service company. There was an announcement in the New York Times that they had started Young Industry for Eisenhower, and that they were setting up headquarters at the Margerie Hotel at 47th Street and Park Avenue, which was going to be torn down, but the owner of the building was allowing the Eisenhower campaign to use it until after the election, because he wasn’t going to be tearing it down until then. But the building was totally empty.

I decided that since I was a salesman for HD, and I needed to go out and get some business, that I would take this fund-raising envelope up to them and see if I could sell it to them. And I walked into their headquarters a few days -- I think maybe the day after it was in the New York Times in February of 1952, and there was a woman standing on a ladder, putting an Eisenhower poster up above the fireplace, and her name was Mary Ann McCaffrey, who later ended up being Eisenhower’s secretary before Ann Whitman.

Birkner: That’s why that name rings a bell.
Wolf: Right. And I told her that I was looking for Stan Rumbough, and she said, “He’s not here. Can I help you?” and introduced herself, and I told her about the envelopes. And she said, “Well, I don’t need a fund-raising envelope, what I need is, I need some stationery sheets. Can you print stationery?” And at that moment, I sort of became the stationer and printer for Citizens for Eisenhower, which is what YIFE became. It became Citizens for Eisenhower, with Walter Williams of Seattle as the chairman of that.

Birkner: So what you’re telling me then, is that this organization of Young Industry for Eisenhower basically germinates into Citizens for Eisenhower.

Wolf: That’s right. Within days.

Birkner: Because Citizens for Eisenhower is a fairly well-known organization in 1952, right?

Wolf: It was founded in February of ’52.

Birkner: Now, you just named another name as the head of that. What happens to Rumbough and Willis?

Wolf: Rumbough and Willis became very active workers, and as I remember, YIFE existed, but it was really under the Citizens for Eisenhower umbrella.

Birkner: And who was the head of Citizens for Eisenhower again?

Wolf: Walter Williams was the chairman; he came from Seattle. Don’t ask me much about him, I don’t remember.

Birkner: Okay, that’s enough.

Wolf: And there was a woman co-chairman, and I think it may have been Madeline Aitken, who was a socially prominent woman in New York, who worked for Rockefeller.

Birkner: I’ve been through the Sherman Adams papers, and I’m certain that I’ve seen some
stationery which has Citizens for Eisenhower on it, so it just would be a matter of going back to my files. You were providing them with actually a contracted service, so something happens wherein you move from being someone who's simply an on-the-make businessman to being someone who's committed to a political cause, right?

Wolf: Well, that's right. At that point, I was just a young businessman. I was 25 years old, just starting my career, and activity in politics was the last thing on my mind; feeding my family was my primary objective. But I became very attached to a lot of the people. I liked them a lot, they liked me. We worked together for nine months, and some relationships were started there that lasted beyond that, although I can't remember any that still exist today, but they lasted for a several years afterward. But about that time, one of my classmates from both Berkshire and Princeton, I think it was him, anyway, a fellow by the name of Lee Weil -- who was Reagan's Ambassador to Nepal during the Reagan presidency, and who played a role in my political career later on, as you'll see -- introduced me to the Young Republicans of New York City, and I joined the group, which was at the time primarily social: picnics, an occasional meeting and relatively little political activity that I was involved in. But I paid my five dollars a year dues...

Birkner: Well, oddly enough, New York had a Republican mayor at that time, or an independent Republican mayor -- Vincent Impelliteri.

Wolf: Now later I become very involved in the Lindsay campaign, as you'll see. In fact, I became sort of Mr. Republican in our firm. Let me just finish up with the Citizens for Eisenhower; I don't want to spend a lot of time with it. Citizens for Eisenhower, I subsequently discovered, was a typical political organization. It was full of volunteers; in that instance, the organization's headquarters at the Margerie Hotel was staffed primarily with a lot of socialites.
New York socialites we called them, because of the Rockefeller connection, because of the location of the headquarters itself, because of the makeup of New York City in those days, for lots of reasons, which at the time might not have been apparent. I think the most interesting single thing that I can pass on to you about that Citizens for Eisenhower campaign, that whole Eisenhower campaign, was that it was the first major user of direct mail for a presidential campaign. And I’m trying to remember the name of the man from Reader’s Digest, which was then still run and owned by the DeWitt and Lila Wallace, lent one of their chief marketing guys, or maybe even two of them, to the campaign, and they sat up in Greenwich, Connecticut and wrote a series of letters. These letters were as long as four and six pages. Nothing like that had ever been used for a political campaign, and they sent these long letters to test lists and themes, and the letters were on various subjects that were important to people then -- whatever people were concerned about.

Birkner: Inflation…

Wolf: Right, to test which letters would get the best results; they were fund-raising letters. They had a return envelope, and they had an Eisenhower brochure in them and so on. But the main thing was the letters, and I might say that the two men who wrote these letters made a name for themselves. And these letters were very, very successful; I don’t have to tell you how much direct mail has been used by political candidates since, but you will find that that was the first substantial use, I’ve always been told, and I wish I had a set of those letters, but I’m sure they’re around somewhere; they would be incredibly interesting.

Birkner: Well, that was also the campaign that really pioneered television advertising, Eisenhower’s 1952 campaign. Sig Larmon, I think, and people like that were very involved in
orchestrating it. Robert Montgomery and whoever.

Wolf: There were a lot of media people -- Fleur Cowles, Gardner Cowles' wife -- was very active in the Eisenhower campaign, and I did a fund-raising dinner with her. We did the brochure, created, printed and distributed it. She was really fussy, but it turned out great, the dinner was a huge success, and I received a lovely thank-you telegram from Dwight D. Eisenhower, which hangs in my house to this day..

Birkner: Could I ask you to clarify something? You have a 40-hour a week job, one presumes. What is your ability to interact with the people in Citizens for Eisenhower if you're doing other calls, making other appointments, doing other things...

Wolf: Ninety percent of my business during the next nine months was with the Eisenhower campaign. The first thing I did every morning after I got to the office, I either called or went up to the Eisenhower headquarters. I went from office to office. I went to the Women for Eisenhower to see if they had some printing for me to do, I went to the Columbia Faculty for Eisenhower; they had all these little groups -- and we printed a different letterhead for each one, and we did the mailings for them.

Birkner: I see.

Wolf: I remember my boss, Mr. Hodes, said to me in late October, “What are you going to do after the election?” And my answer to him was “Starve to death.”

Birkner: It was a good connection.

Wolf: It was a great connection. The other very interesting thing about that campaign -- that you might find interesting anyway -- is they did something I don’t think had ever been done before; they did something called “Operation Thank You.” After he was elected, between the first
Tuesday in November and in January, we sent out from our little print operation and letter shop, 100,000 personalized letters. They gave me a three by five card for every name.

Birkner: To contributors?

Wolf: They were contributors or people who had actively supported Eisenhower and Nixon. And they were addressed to John Smith, Chairman, Columbia University Faculty for Eisenhower; Joe Doe, Member, Hispanics for Eisenhower, and so on. So each category -- I mean, we knew exactly what group we were addressing. There was different body copy, a different thank you and then the card showed you which signature we were to forge. We forged all the signatures: “DDE” or “Ike” or “Dwight D. Eisenhower,” and we forged the signatures on all of those letters. But each one personally, by hand. We didn’t use rubber stamps as we’d done on the campaign letters; actually we had used a rubber signature plate. As a matter of fact, after the inauguration, I came down to Washington and came to the White House and presented Sherman Adams with a wooden block on which I had mounted his signature plate and put on a little plaque reading: “This signature plate was used on 150,000 letters in support of Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his candidacy for president,” or some wording of that type. But what made this “Operation Thank You” unique was that it was so splintered. Each group was pinpointed -- I don’t think any group of letters was more than three or four hundred. There were different texts on every group of letters and each one was hand-signed either “Dwight D. Eisenhower,” “Ike,” or “DDE.” And they told me which to use on each one. And I think to this day I have a few blank sheets of stationery left from Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Birkner: Did you personally sign Ike’s name on some of them?

Wolf: No, we had a professional forger. I had him in New York.
Birkner: I like it; that’s news to me. You mentioned Sherman Adams. How about mentioning any contact you had with him in ’52 or ’53. Was that it? Was that the one contact you had with Sherman Adams?

Wolf: I had very limited contact. I had a lot of contact with a lot of people in 1952 at the Margerie Hotel, and I was not interested in coming to Washington. I made that one trip to Washington and spent not even a night in Washington. I just went to the White House. I’m not even sure Mr. Adams came out himself; he probably sent his secretary out to get it. I wasn’t really a very important person actually.

Birkner: You were a young fellow.

Wolf: Yeah, I was a young vendor and the secretaries and the volunteers -- all the volunteers -- knew me, and they loved me because I was very responsive. I’ve always been very good at follow-up, and I did what needed to be done. I did it in a timely fashion; they didn’t care about cost; I probably overcharged everybody. I’m not saying we did, but I mean, that wasn’t their main concern; their main objective was to get things done quickly and on time.

Birkner: And well.

Wolf: And well. So that was an exciting time. One funny anecdote there: On October 13th of 1952, our first child was born -- a son -- and before I married my wife, I had said to her that I was hopeful our first child would be a son, and that I wanted to name him Paul Delano Wolf. The Paul is for my father, the Delano for the seventh direct descendent of John Adams, a man by the name of Delano DeWindt, who was like a second father to me. He was the headmaster of Berkshire School while I was there, and he was a Republican. But of course, people in New York would think that Delano was for Delano Roosevelt. So when I came into the headquarters,
and everybody there knew that I was about to have a baby, and every day they were asking me whether we’d had the baby, and I come in on the 13th with my cigars, and I said, “We’ve had a baby!” “Oh, what are you going to name him?” I said, “Paul D. Wolf.” “Oh, you named him after Dwight Eisenhower!” And to this day, they think that the Paul D. was for Dwight Eisenhower, whose birthday is on the 14th of October, as you know.

Birkner: That’s a wonderful story. But he is Delano.

Wolf: He’s Paul Delano Wolf, a very proud name.

Birkner: Very, very nice. How many children did you have?

Wolf: I had another one, Cathrine Ann Wolf -- my son is a lawyer -- but my daughter has a much more interesting job; she’s a founding editor of *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, and the senior editor of it today.

Birkner: That’s very interesting. And when was she born?

Wolf: My daughter was born in 1955. Since you were asking about my children. We of course planned that our son would go to Princeton, and he was indeed accepted to Princeton but turned it down to go to Stanford.

Birkner: That must’ve hurt!

Wolf: That was very, very upsetting. And we had always planned for our daughter to go to Stanford, but Stanford turned our daughter down, so she went to Princeton. At the time she was born, they didn’t take women, and we had never thought that she could go there. And she loved Princeton and has become very active, and as a matter of fact, been nominated in the first round for a trustee this year. Whether she’s going to make it to the finals is doubtful. She doesn’t have enough money!
Birkner: Well, we know one vote she'll get, right? You actually have to campaign to get on...

Wolf: No, no, there’s a committee, and they get a lot of names, and then they ask these names to fill out questionnaires, and my daughter got to that level. They haven’t announced which people will actually be – it’s like a primary, who will actually run.

Birkner: Well, tell me where you were on the night of the election of 1952.

Wolf: Would you believe that I don’t remember?

Birkner: Were you home with your new baby?

Wolf: I was not at the campaign headquarters. My guess is we were home listening on the radio.

We didn’t have a television set.

Birkner: Obviously, you were gratified to see Eisenhower elected.

Wolf: Oh, yeah, that was very exciting. Well, I felt like I was a part of that.

Birkner: Did you also have a sense of depression that it was indeed over, and you were going to have to go about your business without the same adrenaline rush?

Wolf: Well, at that point, quite honestly, with a newborn baby and a wife who had just quit her job to stay home with our child, I had a concern over how I was going to make a living, and fortunately I was able to work that out and spent 15 years with that firm which today is the largest in the world -- almost a billion dollars last year. It’s now called Ogilvy Mather Direct.

Birkner: Oh, my god, yes, sure.

Wolf: Well, Ogilvy bought Hodes-Daniel as the first of their direct mail acquisitions; then they bought many other companies, and a fellow that Bob Hodes and I hired -- Bob and I are still both alive but out of the business -- the fellow Bob Hodes and I hired is today Chairman of the Board of Ogilvy Direct, which is...
Birkner: . . . A subsidiary of that bought-up company.

Wolf: . . . Which is worldwide.

Birkner: In the years that followed, I know you were working for this company. Were you a contributor to Republican campaigns and active in any way?

Wolf: The company and my political career are very closely connected. This envelope that I mentioned, while it wasn’t used by the Eisenhower campaign, was used by a lot of individual congressional candidates and by a lot of universities for fund-raising. And in -- I wish I could remember the exact year but I don’t -- but sometime in the early 60s I got a phone call from a fellow by the name of Robert Price who said he was the campaign manager for John Lindsay, who was running for congressman then. And could I bring him down the envelope? Somebody had told him about the envelope and he wanted to see it that afternoon.

Birkner: What year was that?

Wolf: Well, I’m trying to remember.

Birkner: It would have been ‘58 maybe?

Wolf: I think later.

Birkner: Sixty?

Wolf: I think ‘60.

Birkner: Frederick Coulter was the congressman from the silk stocking district in the ‘50s. I’m trying to think if he left in ‘58 or ‘60.

Wolf: I got this call, let’s say 1960, I think that’s about right -- from Robert Price. Is that name familiar to you?

Birkner: Oh, yes. He was the mastermind behind Lindsay.
Wolf: And the mastermind behind Nelson Rockefeller’s campaign for President. He ran Rockefeller’s only primary victory...it was in Oregon, I think... and to this day he is a very close friend of mine.

Birkner: Is he in the communications business?

Wolf: Price Communications. It’s on the American Exchange, and it went through a complete reorganization a couple of years ago, and after the reorganization, those of us who owned stock and had got very little hurt in the early time, if we held on, as I did, we’ve done just fine. But that has nothing to do with...

Birkner: No, that’s all right; it gives us a sense of Price. He called you, and what did he ask you?

Wolf: He wanted to see the envelope. He wanted to have it right away. Bob Price is probably the most interesting political personality that I know. He has been a very successful campaign manager and was deputy mayor of New York under Lindsay as you know. Anyway, I supplied him with the envelope and they sent it out and got very, very good results from it, and then he called me, and he said, “I want you to go up and see a congressman” -- we were living in Westchester by then -- “up in your district. Ogden Reid. Have you ever showed this to Ogden Reid?” And I said, “No.” Ogden Reid was then still a Republican. And Ogden Reid bought the envelope and used it. And then the next thing, I got a call from him saying, “A fellow running for congressman down in Maryland -- his name is Matt Matthias -- he flies his own plane, and he needs 30,000 envelopes; he needs them tomorrow afternoon. He’ll fly his own plane up to...” there’s an airport in Queens right there, near LaGuardia. And he landed his own plane and I took them over to the plane and they went out the next day, very short notice. Bob Price was my best salesman. He sold it to politicians all over the United States. He loved the envelope! It did
great things for him, and we sold this fund-raising envelope to an awful lot of politicians, and they were always Republican politicians. Then Bob Price said to me at some point along the line, “What else do you do?” So he started having me do some printing and mailing. And the interesting thing about -- oh, and then we had a very interesting treat. He invited my wife and me to a luncheon at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, which was Republican headquarters in New York City. And John Lindsay had a monthly luncheon there to which he would invite 10 or 12 people -- or rather, Bob Price would invite 10 or 12 people that he wanted John Lindsay to meet or that might want to meet John Lindsay. And he invited my wife and me, and at this luncheon there was a fellow by the name of Bill Safire, who was in the process of writing a book then about his trip to Russia with Richard Nixon. And I have the book to this day. . .

Birkner: It was actually written. I never heard of the book.

Wolf: Oh, yeah, he wrote a book. And it has a picture of Khrushchev and Nixon having the famous kitchen debate on the cover. Safire actually set up that opportunity.

Birkner: The famous kitchen debate?

Wolf: Yeah, I think Safire set it up.

Birkner: Amazing man, Safire.

Wolf: Right. And my wife had the privilege of sitting next to John Lindsay, so we became friends with John and Mary Lindsay. And we got very much involved in their campaign, and Bob Price was -- one of the interesting things was he’s a very manipulative person and he never tells anybody anything they don’t need to know. He only tells you what you need to know. So, for instance, when he got ready to run Lindsay for mayor, I got a call one Sunday at home, and he said to me, “I need to know by tomorrow morning at nine o’clock how much it would cost
me to address two million triplicate labels, and I need a price on six million envelopes and also on six million mailings.” And that’s all he told me, nothing more. I subsequently found out he called other people about printing costs -- our printing plant wasn’t big enough to do that kind of printing job. And eventually, we did that job. That was for the mayoralty campaign, and what he provided for us were all the election rolls for every district in New York City, and we typed triplicate labels, and then we subsequently attached them. We did all the mailings for the Lindsay mayoralty campaign. So in a way I knew a week before Lindsay announced for mayor that he was going to probably run for it, but Bob Price never told you any information. You didn’t need to know that. All you needed to know was that he needed some information, and he needed it by tomorrow morning, and he was expecting it by tomorrow morning. And one of the reasons that Bob Price and I became such good friends was that I never disappointed him, which was why I was successful for Eisenhower, too, and why my direct mail career was successful, because I was excellent at follow-up. And I mention that only because what happened with Bob Price next was rather interesting. Bob Price talked with me in 1966 or ’67. He said to me, “Why are you staying with HD? The family owns the business, you only own 10 percent of it.” -- which I had gotten from them -- “You ought to have your own business.” He said, “You go find your own business and I’ll put up the money for it.” And he said it rather flippantly, but Bob Price is a man that when he says something to you, you can bet on it. I then left HD at the end of ’67 -- sold out my interest -- spent a year looking for a business to buy and one day I found the business I wanted to buy, and I said -- quite by chance, Bob Price and I were going to a theater benefit that I was running that night in New York City, and so I knew I was going to see him, and he walked in, in his tuxedo with his wife, and I said to him, “I found the business I want
today.” He said, “How much do you need?” I said “Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars,” and he said, “Call me tomorrow morning. I’ll be in the office at nine o’clock.” I called him at nine the next morning, and he told me who to go see and a week later I had two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which we both lost. I put up two fifty, he put up two fifty, and the business, which I had for three years, did not turn out to be successful, though parts of it were. But I had this very wonderful experience with Bob Price at that time. He was running a business also on the American Stock exchange called Price Capital. It was an investment company, and that’s where the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars came from. And that was not a success for him. I’m trying to remember. By ’67, he’d been deputy mayor and he’d been executive vice president of Dreyfus. And he now had his own investment company.

Birkner: Let me just ask you a question, if I might, since I’m allowed to be curious in these kinds of interviews. You were willing to give up a comfortable life, you have a house in Westchester, two kids who are growing up, a family, in short, to feed. You were willing to give that up for a year, essentially live off your savings, looking for a company to buy on the basis of the comments of somebody you had met in politics?

Wolf: Well, you have to remember that first of all, I was naive about the politics thing. I didn’t know that you didn’t trust people in politics, and Bob Price was a friend. Secondly, I mentioned earlier, that I had -- and have -- a huge ego, and I had nothing but self-confidence. I knew I was good at what I did; I figured that I could succeed. Thirdly, I left HD with a pile of money. I really made a lot of money there.

Birkner: You were ready for a new challenge.

Wolf: I was ready for a new challenge. Bob Hodes -- when I first joined HD, I was the “genius”
there. And as a matter of fact, the reason I got the 10 percent was because before his father died, he wanted to protect Bob against the risk of my leaving and taking all the business with me. He made me give him a non-compete clause in exchange for the 10 percent; I gave him a non-compete clause for five years.

Birkner: Right, sure, that’s common.

Wolf: And by that time — I’d been there 15 years in 1967 -- Bob had become his own man and although I controlled 97 percent of the clients, he controlled 50 percent of the billings... four huge accounts that he’d inherited from his father. And we were not getting along that well, although to this day we’re friends, but not as good friends as we were when he was an usher at my wedding. And it was time for me to move on, yeah, it really was time for me to move on. And I came out of HD with over $300,000, which was a lot of money in 1967.

Birkner: A lot of money.

Wolf: A lot of money. And I was making -- a contract that guaranteed me a minimum of $50,000 a year, that they paid off. They bought that out on me. I’d just signed a new contract for five more years and I’d only used up one year on that. And then I had the non-compete contract that paid me money too, so I got a lot of money out of it.

Birkner: You weren’t on welfare in that year.

Wolf: I was not on welfare. And although losing $250,000 when I did go into a business venture was very hurtful, and we had to kind of take it easy for awhile, skimp a little, we never have missed a meal, my kids as I told you, went to -- my son after he went to Stanford, turned down Princeton; then he went to Berkeley for Law School at Boalt Hall. This time he turned down Yale Law School, which wasn’t all that bad. He’s a very successful criminal lawyer on the West
Coast, and before he went to Stanford, he went to Deerfield. My daughter went --

Birkner: So you were able to give your kids the best.

Wolf: Yeah, my daughter went to Concord Academy and then went to Princeton. They never had to work their way through. They had to earn their own spending money, but they didn’t have to pay for the tuition.

Birkner: No, you were doing this, providing the absolute best opportunities for them. Well now, you never made it clear to me, you did this contract work for the Lindsay people. You were not yourself a private volunteer for Lindsay or anything like that in his campaigns for mayor.

Wolf: I didn’t have time to do the door-to-door kind of thing. As I remember -- actually, that’s not true. When we lived in New York, my wife and I were -- what do they call them? -- block captains in our apartment building, and we did distribute literature to all the doors and stuff like that. And when we lived out in Westchester, we distributed literature. We did some of that. But I never did any political fund-raising in those days, although I subsequently became a really outstanding fund-raiser for charities. Very good at asking for money for them, not afraid to ask for causes I believe in. But I was never an active fund-raiser in politics. And I was never really a sort of “precinct person” like you read about. I was always -- at the policy level, people asked me a lot for advice, and you know, I gained a lot of experience because of the exposure I had to the top people in all these campaigns. But I’m really not a political animal in the sense that people who worked their way up in the campaign and advised candidates and so on, I really am not. I’m more of an amateur.

Birkner: Well, let me ask you this, then. Where does the Nelson Rockefeller connection come in? Is it as early as the 1960s while he’s governor?
Wolf: Oh, earlier than that. I joined the Young Republicans of New York City in the ‘50s, and of course, Nelson Rockefeller was sort of our guru. I’m amazed we’re spending so much time on my early life. I had anticipated that you would be mostly interested in my Nixon connections.

Birkner: Let me ask you, you were involved in this new enterprise in 1969, and 1970, ‘71, ‘72, and obviously that was a struggle. Where does Nixon fit into the picture?

Wolf: In 1970, when I bought this business with Bob Price’s money and mine, we moved back into New York City from Westchester. Our daughter was at Concord Academy, our son was at Stanford, and so we moved back into New York City. And one of the first things that happened after I moved back to New York City is that this friend of mine who I mentioned earlier -- Lee Weil -- had become the treasurer for Jim Buckley’s campaign for senator. Lee is my oldest friend. We went to Berkshire together, went to Princeton together, and I haven’t talked to him since yesterday. He is a Conservative to the right of Attila the Hun. I mean, he’s really -- that’s just the description we use -- he’s very, very conservative. Bill Buckley and the Buckley family had been friends of his since the ‘50s. So he was treasurer for Jim Buckley. And he also happens to be very wealthy, which helps. Jim Buckley was elected senator, and I was appointed to the Small Business Committee -- the Small Business Advisory Committee -- I think each senator has a chance to submit some names and Lee called me, and he said. “Jim’s looking for some people who have experience in small business like you do, and who would be activists.” So I went on this Small Business Committee, and that was the first time I ever did anything political.

Birkner: Was this a political committee or was this a committee of government?

Wolf: It was an advisory committee. We met a couple of times, we didn’t meet very often. But
that was my start, you know, it gave me some credentials. Not just somebody saying, “Well, he’s a good Republican,” but I actually served on a committee where they checked out my credentials to make sure that I was eligible for it, checked out my registration to make sure I was registered as a Republican. And that was in ‘71 and ‘72. And then in ‘73, no, I guess in ‘72, the business failed, and I spent most of ‘72 collecting all our accounts receivable and paying off everybody, so nobody would get stuck with anything. And by then my non-compete clause with HD had expired, because I’d left there in December 1967. It was a five-year non-compete. And it had expired, so I decided to go back into the direct mail business.

Just before I was ready to go back into the direct mail business -- I had just been back at it for maybe a week or two -- in January of 1973 I got a phone call from Lee, who said to me, “Tom, you always have said to me that you want to spend some time working for the government before you retire.” And I said, “I have always said that to you.” And he said, “Well, I had lunch with Dave Jones in Washington last night,” -- Dave Jones at the time was the administrative assistant to Jim Buckley and was from Tennessee -- Chattanooga, Tennessee -- and was quite well-known in Washington and very conservative, and a great friend of Howard Phillips.

[End Tape 1 Side 1]

[Start Tape 1 Side 2]

Wolf: [in progress] He said, “President Nixon is going to send up a zero-dollar budget for OEO.” And I said, “What’s OEO?” And he said, “The Office of Economic Opportunity.” I said, “Oh.” I had no idea what it was. And he said, “The president is going to send in this group of people that Dave Jones is organizing, that are going to close up the agency. And it’s going to be
a very exciting time, but you’ve got to understand” -- this was in January – “that this job won’t last beyond June 30th” -- because that’s when the fiscal year ended in those days, 1973. The fiscal year was going to end June 30th, there was going to be no money for OEO the following year. “Would you be interested in that, in going down there and helping do that?” And I said, “That sounds very interesting. I’d certainly like to talk to somebody about that.” So he said, “Well, a fellow by the name of Peter McPherson will call you.” I said, “Okay.” I didn’t hear anything for about two weeks. And suddenly on a Sunday night at 10:30, approximately February 14th or 15th, I got a call -- whatever that Sunday was -- at ten o’clock at night, and a fellow by the name of Peter McPherson introduced himself. Now, do you know who Peter McPherson was?

Birkner: Well, I knew he was involved in the Nixon administration.

Wolf: Shall I tell you about Peter McPherson?

Birkner: Sure, give me a capsule.

Wolf: At the time, Peter McPherson was an IRS agent, a lawyer, who was working for the IRS, and who had been leant by the IRS to OEO -- or taking a leave of absence from IRS -- to work in a little room at OEO, and he was calling Republicans all over the country, recruiting them to come in and help close up OEO. And he subsequently went back to the IRS, then became a lawyer in Washington and in 1981, when Ronald Reagan became President, he became head of AID. And he left AID to become Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, and then he left at the end of the Reagan administration. Next he became Executive Vice President of either Crocker National or Bank of America, one of the two big banks in San Francisco. And approximately a year and a half ago, he became president of Michigan State University, and the only prominence he’s gotten
at Michigan State University that I’m aware of, was about a month ago, when he fired the
football coach of 17 years! Remember that?

Birkner: I do indeed, yes.

Wolf: That got him some real publicity. And that is who Peter McPherson was and is. (Ed. Note:
He’s still President of Michigan State as this is being edited in 2000.)

Birkner: He asked you to come down there.

Wolf: And he said to me, “Can you be in Washington at seven o’clock tomorrow morning?”
And I said, “No way.” I said, “The last shuttle has left tonight, and the first shuttle doesn’t leave
LaGuardia until seven.” He said, “Well, when can you be here?” I said, “Nine.” So at nine
o’clock the next morning, I was in this little office in the OEO building on 18th and M Street and
met Peter McPherson, and he said, “Oh, you’re Tom Wolf. Here, fill out this piece of paper.” It
was a one-page questionnaire. And he said, “I want you to go up and see Lawrence McCarty.”
Lawrence McCarty was an old friend of Howard Phillips and later became a very good friend of
mine. And I went up to see Lawrence McCarty. Lawrence McCarty had arrived a week earlier,
and Howard had appointed him as the Associate Director for Administration of the Office of
Economic Opportunity, with a budget of 1.6 billion dollars. He was a lawyer from The New
England Mutual Insurance Company (it may have been Mass Mutual), and The New England
had lent him to this operation -- you know, take a leave of absence -- and paid by them, too, and
he had come down to Washington to help Howard Phillips. This was the first time I heard
Howard Phillips’ name, that morning; well, maybe Lee Weil had mentioned it to me. I’m not
sure. And McCarty interviewed me for about half an hour and got my background and most of
my Republican credentials and said to me, “All right, I want you as my deputy. When can you

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start? Can you start today?” “No!” I said, “I’ve got to go back to New York and tell my wife I’m coming down here for six months, and I’ve got to find an apartment down here.” I said, “What about next Tuesday?” The reason I said next Tuesday was that next Monday was Washington’s birthday, a holiday. I told him, “I’ll be here next Tuesday morning.” He said, “Fine.” So I went home and quit the job that I’d had for about two or three weeks, and I told my wife what I was going to do, and she was very, very supportive of me.

And I came down on Monday of Washington’s birthday and found myself an apartment at 4000 Massachusetts Avenue, subleased an apartment, and showed up for work at seven o’clock on the Tuesday after George Washington’s birthday, 1973. That’s a very important day, because that’s the day 50,000 people were scheduled to march on Congress to object that OEO was going to be closed. It was shortly thereafter, of course, that several lawsuits were filed. One, that Phillips had never been legally named; his name had never been sent up to the senate, so that he wasn’t legally the Director of OEO. The other famous lawsuit was the one that you couldn’t close an agency with funds that were appropriated for another purpose, and since no funds had been appropriated to close OEO, you couldn’t close OEO. It was those two arguments that prevented us from closing OEO at that time. And Phillips got fired in June, and OEO stayed open until Dwight Ink, who by then was an old friend of mine (and who’s been coming to Gordon Haaland’s luncheons for the World Affairs Institute the last two times) got it done. And he did close it up about 10 years later, but it took another six to 10 years before the OEO got closed up.

When I walked in that morning, Lawrence McCarty was standing by the window looking out,
waiting for these marchers to show up, and he said to me, “Oh! Good morning, Tom. I’ve got some news for you. Since you were here last Monday, Howard Phillips has appointed me Director of Legal Services, and you are now the Acting Director of Administration for OEO.” And that’s how I came into the federal government! It was 1973, I was 46 years old, I was a hell of a good salesman, I was a pretty good manager, but I had absolutely no idea about anything in government, or how to run anything. He handed me a folder with three 171s (resumes) for my three division directors and three one-page summaries he had each one of them prepare, which listed what were their main priorities for the next six months. And there I was, in charge of administrative services, procurement, internal audit, and personnel. I had four divisions. I did not have the comptrollers office. As a matter of fact, MacPherson had recruited on the same day a fellow by the name of Tom Rollis, who several years later followed MacPherson to AID and now has followed him to Michigan State as a senior administrative assistant. Tom Rollis and I were the only ones who stayed on after Howard Phillips and all the ideologues left in June. He and I stayed on, asked by Al Arnett, who took over from Howard Phillips. Arnett had come out of the Appalachian Regional Council, was a Southerner. He was the Deputy under Phillips, and he took over OEO. And his name was sent over to the senate, and he was confirmed by the senate. And I stayed on, and then I agreed to stay on for a year or two.

At that point, we gave up our apartment in New York, and my wife moved down to Washington, and we rented a house in Chevy Chase. Before that, my wife had been coming down every Thursday night -- she had a four-day-a-week job, and she’d come down Thursday night or Friday morning and spend the weekend in Washington because I worked seven days a week.
A couple of interesting things happened at OEO while I was there. We transferred most of the programs to other agencies -- the manpower programs, the health programs, the minorities programs. The only program that Howard Phillips wanted to kill was the Community Action Program, and then, of course, he wanted to kill the bureaucracy, OEO, that housed all these programs. There were 10 regional offices throughout the United States, and he wanted to get rid of all of them -- pull down all those offices, and that was eventually done. But in the meantime, before June 30th, we had some half a billion dollars to give away, and of course what Howard Phillips tried to do was not only give the money to the organizations that were going to use them the way he and Nixon thought they ought to be used -- to Nixon people -- but more importantly, he wanted to tie strings to every grant -- so that we devoted our time not only to selecting who was supposed to receive the grants but writing grant restrictions with every grant. And I don’t know whether that had ever been done before. And it wasn’t very successful, and there was a lot of opposition to it. And you know the stories about how they tried to close down Legal Services and prevent Legal Services from being advocates against the government and to restrict what kind of cases they could deal with and those kind of things, and prohibit activism against the government. I didn’t get into each of the programs very much because I was providing the administrative services for the agency, rather than the substantive services for the agency.

Birkner: Did you like getting up every morning and going to work?

Wolf: Oh, I loved it, yeah. Very exciting. And those were times when things were -- you know, we worked all day, we drank all night, we did a lot of partying, we did a lot of hard work, we didn’t take a lot of time for lunch, we had incredible power. I had a personal assistant assigned
to me by Howard Phillips, who had worked for Nixon’s Reelection Committee; I can’t remember his name -- anyway, he was a GS-9 -- funny story -- they gave him a Schedule C-9. You know what a Schedule C is? (Political appointee.) And he could be let go at the pleasure of the director or the president at any time. And he had worked for the Committee to Reelect, and he must have been all of 21 years old. He was a nothing -- I couldn’t use him at all. I used to send him out to the airport to pick up my wife on Thursdays. In those days I had been given a car with a telephone in it, chauffeured during the day. And I mean those were wild days. And so I would send him out with a driver in my car to pick up my wife and take her to our apartment on Thursday afternoons. Well, he turned out later on in the Reagan administration to be appointed Cabinet Secretary. And today he has a consulting firm in Washington. And there were a lot of young people like that: Susan Davis -- that name probably doesn’t mean anything to you; a gal by the name of Marcia Myers who’s married to [Frank] Carlucci, and she was living with Susan Davis, a powerhouse in Washington today. She has a building named after her, she has about eight or nine different businesses, political campaigns, special events, lobbying, all these things. There were a lot of exciting young people -- Tom Carroccio, Phil Sanchez. There were just a lot of exciting young people at OEO in those days, and I didn’t become very good friends with many of them, but Susan Davis I became good friends with, Tom Carroccio and a couple of others. And I see them from time-to-time today. Anyway, I had intended to stay on, but in October of that year, September or October, I got a call from the Assistant Administrator for Administration at GSA. The reason we had a connection with GSA was that if we had been successful in closing the agency, GSA would have been the sort of successor agency; you turn all your books and everything in to GSA and they keep them for awhile until all the bills are paid and everything is
settled. So it’s a housekeeping agency for the government. And so some people at GSA had apparently met me in the February -- we had held meetings preparing for this closing, which never happened -- and somebody must have been impressed by me, because they passed my name on to a fellow by the name of Al Kaupinen. And Al Kaupinen had been in the White House in the Personnel Department during Nixon’s first term and had picked for himself this job as the senior management official of GSA, and that’s where he was. And Arthur Sampson had just been confirmed as the administrator of GSA, but he’d been at GSA a long time; he’d been the head of PBS (Public Buildings), and he’d been the head of Federal Supply, and he’d just become the administrator. He was from Pennsylvania and was very, very, very political and was actually a sort of a puppet, although he was the best manager I ever worked with, a really good manager. But he was a puppet of the senator from Pennsylvania, who was a senator for so many, many years.

Birkner: Hugh Scott?

Wolf: Hugh Scott, that’s it. So I was called down to see Kaupinen, and they asked me whether I would come over to GSA and be the head of a new operation they were starting, to write regulations for the government. GSA was getting that job, which really belonged in OMB, and subsequently went to OMB, but at the time was going to GSA. And I said, “No way,” I didn’t want to write regulations all day. I didn’t mind doing some staff work, but I liked to be where the action was... in operations. So they said, “Thank you.”

About a month and a half later, Kaupinen called me again, and he said, “I want you to come down here and meet Art Sampson, the administrator of GSA.” And I said, “Ok.” So I went
down, and I was supposed to have a half hour meeting with the administrator of GSA, Art Sampson, and we had this two-hour meeting -- we immediately liked each other. It was the end of November, and he said to me, “I have just appointed a Special Study Committee on the Selections of Architects and Engineers for Federal Contracts.” And he had appointed this committee, called the GSA Special Study Committee on Selection of Architects and Engineers for Federal Contracts, on the day Vice-President Agnew resigned! (For taking bribes from Architects and Engineers.) And what it was, basically, to study -- well, it was going to be to whitewash GSA, that they were doing everything honestly, they weren’t favoring any of the architects and engineers or they weren’t being paid off by any architects and engineers -- and to review the whole process. And he wanted somebody to come in as the executive director of this committee. The committee consisted of 19 people, 18 of whom were from the private sector, and one, as the law requires for a government committee, was a government employee from GSA from Public Buildings. And the head of the committee was Gerald Hines, from Texas -- does that name mean anything to you? He was then the largest builder and owner, after Trammel Crow; at the time, he was the second largest builder and developer in the United States of America. The Galleria in Houston is his, Pennzoil Plaza, he also owns a couple of buildings now in New York, a couple in Washington, he’s huge. Gerald D. Hines. Of course I had never heard of him either. And the other people on this committee were purchasing agents, architects, engineers, lawyers, etc. And he wanted someone like me -- I had been highly recommended to him as somebody who was a good Republican, but on the other hand was a careerist -- I had gotten myself converted from political appointee to careerist by my personnel people at OEO who had told me, “Don’t take any of these supergrade jobs. All the others are applying for those,
and they're all just going to disappear with OEO. What you want to do is get yourself a permanent job in the government.” So I had applied for a job, which we had posted for Director of Administration for OEO as a grade 15/10, which was exactly the same salary, $36,000 then, as a Supergrade GS-18, the highest level in the government. Everybody was frozen at the top; you know, there was a ceiling. And whether you were 15/10 or a Supergrade 18, didn’t matter salary-wise. So I had been converted to a careerist, almost impossible today, but in 1973 anything was still possible. So here I had career status, and I had credibility both as a careerist and as a Republican.

Birkner: I take it that you get career status with this job, the study committee on selection of architects.

Wolf: No, I was going to tell you that, and I said to him, “What are you going to bring me over here as?” And he said, “I’m going to bring you over as my special assistant.” I said, “But that’s a non-career job, and I’m a careerist.” And he said, “We’ll take care of that.” And I said, “What happens six months from now when this report is due to congress in June of 1974?” And he said, “Don’t worry, I will take care of it.” And again, I’m a very trusting person as you can see. And this was too exciting a job to pass up. Plus, my job at OEO was tenuous, because they were still trying to close OEO, and I figured they’d get that done. By this time, my wife had fallen in love with Washington; she had moved down here, we were beginning to burn our bridges to New York, and we loved Washington, we loved living in Chevy Chase, and New York was beginning to not be so attractive any more and very expensive. And so I discussed it with my wife and I called Art Sampson and I said, “Yeah, I’d like to have that interview with Gerry Hines.” It was subject to the interview with Gerry Hines, but it was pretty much --
Birkner: *Pro forma.*

Wolf: And Gerry Hines and I got along very well, and so I came in, and I ran this committee for six months, and we had all these deadlines, but we turned out an excellent report. This was a historic report too, because what Sampson did, is on December 10, 1973, he had held a public meeting for the press at which he announced that this committee could play with everything in the system in the process. They could change anything they wanted, with one exception: that he would continue as the owner of the buildings, the administrator of GSA, to make the final selection of the architects and engineers. At that time the selection committees would forward a small group of six qualified professionals who had applied for an engineering job or an architectural job, and the administrator could pick any one of the six names. And of course, when he had the list in front of him he had a lot of flexibility -- and he admitted this publicly to the press that day. He said, "I admit that if the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee" -- who at the time was a Democrat -- would call me or Congressman Hollifield was it, Chet Hollifield? I think it was Hollifield. "If Congressman Hollifield would call me and say, "You got that list in front of you? Is Jones and Company on that? Pick them." And if Jones and Company were on it, and they were one of the six that had been sent up to me as acceptable, I would pick them." He admitted it. So he wanted that system to be looked at. And he said, "You can change anything, except I have the final selection." Well, we started meeting, and we came to the conclusion that we could leave everything the way it was, any way he wanted it, except that one thing that he wanted: the final selection. And at the end of the sixth month, we came up with a solution that satisfied the whole committee, satisfied him, and satisfied the Congress. Just before the report was sent to every member of Congress, there was a huge meeting at the time it
was released, in June of 1974. In the six preceding months, Sampson had been taking a terrible beating on Key Biscayne and San Clemente, because he had been building all those things for Nixon that Nixon had asked him to build. And of course, I will tell you, because I was there, that when Haldeman or Ehrlichman call on the phone and say, “Hello, Mr. Sampson, the president wants you to put in a helicopter pad at San Clemente,” there is only one answer that you give: “Yes, sir! When do you need it by?” And of course, Sampson was taking incredible heat for all the things he had done at San Clemente and at Key Biscayne, and this report was the only good publicity he got that year. And there were hundreds of letters from architects and engineers from all over the country and from the Congress to him saying, “This report really makes sense.” And what we did in this report, just very briefly, is we gave all the authority to a selection committee and the selection committee -- it was a nonpartisan selection committee -- would forward the names in a one, two, three order, and unless the Administrator selected number one, he had to give a written explanation of why he didn’t select number one. And to the best of my knowledge, he always selected number one.

Birkner: That’s a very good plan.

Wolf: The following administrators always selected number one. You can have this.

Birkner: I probably don’t need to have that; if I were you, I would keep that.

Wolf: I’ve got plenty of extra copies. Anyway, I worked on that for six months, and then when that was finished, he gave me a really fun assignment that took about a month, and that was to rewrite the foreign gifts act of the United States. Foreign gifts were scattered all over Washington. People would go to Europe -- top government officials -- and they would receive some beautiful piece of jewelry or some beautiful gift, and they’d bring it back, and they’d dump
it in the office somewhere. Of course the law required them to turn it in, if it was valued over 50 dollars. . . we changed it to a hundred dollars because of inflation. A lot of these traveling bureaucrats did turn these gift in (but not all), and I went over to the State Department, and the assistant chief of protocol -- Benny Whitehead, I remember -- took me down to a cloakroom on the main floor, and he opened the door, and in the back of the cloakroom were just boxes and boxes of gifts and stuff that diplomats who had returned and turned into him. And it was scattered all over. And then there was the gift section of the White House, where the presidential gifts come in. And what we did was we found a vault in the Forrestal Building, and we collected all of these gifts except the White House gifts, and we catalogued them all, we put them on a computer, and we wrote a new set of regulations. And I worked with Kissinger’s people on that and with the White House on that, and that’s how I got my first taste of some of the people at the White House.

Birkner: What were they supposed to do in this vault? Just sit there forever?

Wolf: Well, see, GSA would lend them to museums later on -- at that point they were supposed to just sit there until somebody determined what to do with them. But we started a lending program to museums, and also we loaned them to cabinet-level people and just below cabinet level. Anyone who was appointed with the consent and advice of Congress. Also the Senate could ask to borrow some of the statuettes and the paintings and some of the other beautiful things -- lots of wonderful things.

Birkner: Well now, let me ask you this. I mean, was it simply catch-as-catch-can whether a public official -- say an assistant secretary of state or something -- got a gift on a visit to a foreign country. Was it just luck whether that person decided to give them back to the government?
Wolf: Honesty.

Birkner: Honesty. What I mean, it varied from individual to individual, right?

Wolf: A huge amount of things slipped through the cracks and as you can well imagine, a lot of things that were worth a lot more than a hundred dollars suddenly got a value of a hundred dollars or less. But there are a lot of honest people. And some of the things they wouldn't be able to display in their home. I mean tapestries and stuff like that, paintings, without having some explanation of where it came from. So a lot of it did get turned in. And one of the reasons that it was important for us to do that at the time, because there was a columnist for the Washington Post who would write one column after the other, attacking the foreign gifts program, pointing out how many things were going on that shouldn't be going on. While I was working on this gift program -- it's only important in terms of and interesting in the time frame -- Nixon was deciding that he was going to resign, and Sampson sat down with Nixon and wrote the notorious Nixon/Sampson Agreement that you are familiar with -- the Nixon/Sampson Agreement.

Birkner: Well, you know, I'd have to have my memory refreshed.

Wolf: The Nixon/Sampson Agreement, which was written in August of 1974, stipulated that since every president could take all his presidential materials with him when he leaves the White House, that Arthur Sampson -- since there was no depository for these to go to, because most presidents plan for theirs during their second term, and Nixon had had no chance to do that. Plus there were a lot of people who wanted access to this material too, because the Watergate investigations were going on. So Sampson and Nixon agreed that his materials would be shipped to a building the government owned. It was called the Ziggurat building. It was out near San
Clemente, in Laguna Niguel. It’s built like a pyramid. It was built by some company in the defense industry, and the government had bought it or swapped it. A lot of criticism at the time. Congressman Jack Brooks (from Texas... Chairman of Gov Ops) investigated that over and over again. And the Nixon materials would all be stored there in a safe place, where only Richard Nixon would have access to them. And the access would be set up in such a way that he could not take anything out of there, destroy anything, or change anything. And I was given the job to implement that agreement. It was called the Nixon/Sampson Agreement. I think it was done August 22nd, 1974. And Sampson moved me -- Art Sampson, the administrator of the GSA -- I must tell you, I loved working for him, but he was one of the crudest men I’ve ever met – he’s dead now -- but one of the best managers. I mean, you took problems to him, and he gave you decisions right then, and once he gave you a decision and told you to go ahead, he backed you 100 percent. It’s hard to find managers like that; most of them procrastinate. And he many times said, “No,” most of the time he said “No,” but when he said yes, you could bet your life on it. So he had kept all his promises to me, and I was in this very exciting assignment. And he moved me into the dining room of his private office up on the top of the GSA Building. You’ve heard of that office? The largest office in Washington. It’s where the Teapot Dome scandal occurred? Birkner: Uh-huh.

Wolf: That’s a very famous office. It has a huge, huge room and then a private dining room off of it, and he moved me in there because nobody was supposed to know what was going on, and I started negotiating with the White House and the Secret Service and with the Air Force. We were going to use four C-141s to move all the materials. It was going to be done in one huge movement. It was going to be four million separate papers, pages and papers, and so on. And
then the tapes were, at the time, under the control of the Secret Service and they were under some stairs in the Old Executive Office Building. There was a sort of a big closet under these stairs, and that's where the tapes were all stored. And the papers had been moved on the day that Nixon left the White House, which was August, I guess . . .

Birkner: August 9th.

Wolf: August 9th? I figured the Agreement was signed August 22nd. Maybe it was July 22nd. All the papers for Nixon were taken out of the Central Files. They had to come out of Central Files because the new president would take over the Central Files. They'd been moved to the fourth floor of the Old Executive Office Building, and they were stored in room after room on the fourth floor, and an archivist from the Archives by the name of Jack Nesbitt was in charge of them. And everyone who needed to get at the papers went into the papers and dug out what they needed, and whether they left them there or took them out, Nesbitt was supposed to make sure nothing left. But security was very, very poor, and this was not my concern. My concern was just to get a handle on what was up there and then to get it moved to California and to create a security system in California and to make it possible for Richard Nixon to have access without having him be able to destroy anything or take anything out. And I was into that assignment for about two weeks, maybe a little longer, when on October 20th, 1974, Judge Richey, District Court, signed a stay in response to a lawsuit filed by the Reporters Committee for [?]. And everything was to stay exactly where it was. Nothing was to be moved, and access was only to be granted in accordance with the order from Judge Richey. And that access was only to be allowed when the material was needed for an ongoing investigation or an ongoing lawsuit. And Sampson called me to his office at four-thirty in the afternoon and said, "I want you to go over to
the White House, I want you to move over there, I'm putting you in charge of all the papers, their security and authorized access.” There were actually three defendants in this case. The defendants were Philip Buchen, who was the counsel to President Ford; the head of the Secret Service, who had the tapes; and the head of GSA, who had the papers. They were the three defendants of the case. Not Nixon, not Ford, but those three men were the defendants in the case. And Sampson had the largest piece of that pie because he had all the papers. And as Sampson’s representative, and subsequently also Buchen’s representative, I went over to the White House that evening, and ordered the White House to put all of those rooms on the fourth floor of the Old Executive Office Building under one key and to deliver me one copy of the key and to put the second key under glass in the Secret Service office, in case of fire. And that was done that night. And there were alarm systems and observation systems in some of the rooms but not other.

And I then got together with a lawyer from GSA by the name of Steve Garfinkel that night, and we stayed up all night and wrote access regulations which were published maybe four or five days later in the Federal Register, as to who would have access, how they would have access, etc, etc. And those all had to be approved by Nixon’s lawyers, the Justice Department, the Special Prosecutor. Everybody had their finger in that pie. And basically, the regulations said that you had to bring me a court order to have access, that if that court order would satisfy me, then I would make three phone calls. The phone calls may not have actually been mentioned in the order that was published in the Federal Register but they were part of the procedure. The first phone call I had to make was to Nixon’s lawyers and tell them, “Mr. Jones is here; he’s got a court order.” And then if Nixon’s lawyers wanted, they could send a representative over.
the second call I had to make was to the special prosecutor, to tell him, "Mr. Jones is here with an order," and he could send a representative over. And the third call I had to make was to Sampson, because he just wanted to know what was going on, because I was his agent. And the regulation called for an administrative person, which was either me or -- later I got an assistant -- but for the first two months, it was me and no one else. I was on call 24 hours a day. And one archivist. I had six archivists assigned to me who were already working up there. And I never went into the papers without an archivist along, and no archivist ever went into the papers without me or another administrative person along. And so for the first two times or so, Nixon's lawyer came over. It was always Stan Mortenson, who I'll tell you more about, later on. And somebody from the special prosecutor's office, but within a very short period of time, they came to trust me so totally that I didn't even have to call them any more. At first I just had to call them and they'd say, "Well, go ahead. Let us know; we're not sending anybody over." Because they saw how I had the procedure set up, they saw that there were always two people. There were always two of us going in. We didn't take the person who had the search order with us. We found for them what they were looking for. And we kept incredibly complete records of everything. And we never gave out any originals. When we found the paper that somebody wanted, we made a certified copy and then we made another photostatic copy that we put in the file in our offices just to show that that was a piece of paper that we had given out. And then we put the original back where it came from. No originals were ever given out. There were one or two instances, where -- you know in some court cases you have to have the original, you cannot use a certified photostat. You have to provide the original, the law requires it. In those instances, we put a certified copy into the file. I don't remember that happening in more than
two or three cases. In the next year and a half, we made 1,000 accesses. Every one of them was documented. So we created another million pieces of paper or so! But it was very, very carefully documented. We kept logs of every entrance and a record of every document which was copied. What you should know is that I had absolutely nothing to do with the tapes. I know about what happened to the tapes, and I can tell you about that. But I did not have responsibility for the tapes. The Secret Service had responsibility for the tapes, and when people went to get access to the tapes -- which nobody got in those days except one lawyer, who I’ll tell you about -- Bill Casselman. Bill Casselman was Phil Buchen’s deputy. You know who Phil Buchen was. Phil Buchen was counsel to the president. Phil Buchen was an old buddy of Ford’s from Michigan. And Philip Buchen was the counsel to the president, an elderly gentleman, very dignified, fine man, who got Potomac fever much like I did, and after the Ford administration, he stayed in Washington and became a local practicing attorney.

Birkner: Let me just interrupt you, Tom, and say that we really have less than five minutes on this tape, so what I would suggest you do as sort of a closing segueway, and what you and I will have to do is do another interview.

Wolf: Yes, because I get into the most interesting -- this is where I thought we’d start, actually. I didn’t know you’d take that much of my other stuff. But --

Birkner: So why don’t you say whatever seems to be a logical closing point for this era of your career.

Wolf: All right. Are we still on there?

Birkner: You’re still on.

Wolf: During the next couple of months, for some reason, the Nixon lawyers, the Watergate
special prosecutor and the Justice Department all came to trust me totally, and consequently, in early 1975, they asked whether I would take on the searches for materials that were needed for the prosecutions by the Watergate prosecutor. And the way that came about was that the Watergate prosecutor had asked permission from the Nixon lawyers to search the papers and had, of course, been denied. And the Nixon people had said, “Well, you give us a list of what you’re looking for, and we’ll find it for you.” And of course the Watergate prosecutor had not been willing to do it that way. So they decided on Tom Wolf and his staff of six career archivists to be the people who would make those searches. And that operation of those searches is probably the most fascinating experience of my life, because we went through thousands of papers, many written by Richard Nixon. During that period of time I suspect that I saw more papers of the Nixon administration than Nixon himself saw. I had a chance to work with the biographer who wrote the first Nixon book with Nixon – Nixon’s first book -- and it was a really interesting time.

Birkner: You mean his assistant on the autobiography?

Wolf: Yeah. On the first book. Frank Gannon. He was dating Diane Sawyer at the time, I remember that. He was one of the people that went out to San Clemente with Nixon.

Birkner: Okay. He’s not the fellow who’s running the Nixon library now.


Birkner: It wasn’t John Taylor.

Wolf: No, no. John Taylor is not a writer anyway.

Birkner: I vaguely remember who the person was, but I can’t bring it to the tip of my tongue. So you’re saying that the next stage of your career essentially is to oversee the searches in the Nixon papers for the prosecutor and for anybody else who needs access to these papers for legal
reasons.

Wolf: We were doing two things simultaneously. From nine o’clock in the morning until four
o’clock in the afternoon, we were going through these papers for a period of about three months,
for the special prosecutor. The special prosecutor gave us a list of what he was looking for, and
we were looking for those, and we could not give him anything that was not on the list, although
we were authorized, if we found a smoking gun, that we could identify such a thing. We did not
find a smoking gun per se. But we found a lot of the papers that the special prosecutor had
indicated that they wanted to see. And the process of that I think is fascinating and is worth
probably a few minutes discussion.

Birkner: Fortunately, we will have other opportunities, because we’re both of us going to stay in
Gettysburg for awhile. I want to thank you for this opportunity. It was really a lot of fun. I’m
going to stop the tape now at about twenty after one on the 29th of December [1994].

[End of Tape 1 Side 2]

[Tape 2 Side 1]

David Hedrick: August 9, 1995. We’re in Special Collections at Gettysburg College Library.

David Hedrick talking with Mr. Thomas Wolf. Tell us about the Nixon papers.

Wolf: Well, the part that I would like to tell you -- because I think no one else really has a
memory of it because it was such a unique experience -- dates back to 1974, when on or about
September 8th, shortly after Mr. Nixon had left the White House, an agreement was reached
between Mr. Nixon’s lawyers and Arthur Sampson (who was then the administrator of the
General Services Administration) by which all the presidential papers, which were still being
held mostly on the fourth floor of the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House,
would be shipped to Laguna Niguel in California, where there was a government building called
the Ziggurat building -- which in itself is an interesting story but I won't tell that now. And they
would be put in a safe place there, where Mr. Nixon would be able to have access to the papers,
but he would have it on a basis where he could not take any of the papers out of safekeeping or
change them. But at any event, he would have them at his disposal out in California. I was
given the job by the administrator of GSA to whom I was a then a special assistant and finishing
up some other assignments, and he asked me to move right into his office, which had a secure
area, and to make arrangements with the Air Force and the White House and the Archives -- the
National Archives, which were at that time still a part of General Services Administration -- and
to arrange to have all of these materials shipped in a very safe way to Laguna Niguel. We were
going to use 4 C-141s, which are huge planes, and we were going to need -- because there were
four million documents -- we were going to need as I remember three or four of these planes to
ship all the material.

And I got started on that project, but I didn’t get very far on it, because on or about October 20th,
Judge Richey (and I should be able to tell you which court he’s in, but you have the documents
on that, so you know which court it was. It’s a federal court.) came down as a result of a case
originated by a group of reporters called the Reporters Committee for -- something, I don’t
remember -- to keep the papers in Washington and keep them under the control of the federal
government. And so the defendants in that case were Mr. Buchen, as counsel for President Ford,
and the Administrator of GSA, because he was in charge of the Archives, and the third
defendant was the director of the Secret Service, because he had control of the tapes, and this
order was against both the materials and the tapes. Interestingly enough, the tapes were all kept in a little closet underneath a stairwell on the main floor of the Old Executive Office Building, and all -- I don’t know how many tapes there were, and I’ll explain later on we had really very little to do with the tapes -- were in that room, with the only keys to it being held by the Secret Service. And so they were the three defendants in the case, and because the administrator had actual control of the materials, through his authority, he appointed me -- switched my job, so to speak -- instead of using me to ship the papers to California, he gave me the job of going over to the Executive Office Building in the White House complex, securing all those rooms, where the papers were then being kept, under one key, which only I and the Secret Service would have, but the Secret Service key would be kept under glass, so if they used it, they’d have to break the glass and then report the next morning to me why they had broken the glass, for an emergency or something like that. And take control of these papers and allow access in accordance with the court order. The court order permitted people who were involved in trials, or people who had other legitimate reasons that they could prove to the court and could get a court order for access to the papers, they could then bring that court order to the administrator of GSA, whose agent I acted as.

But this access could not be allowed unless Mr. Nixon’s lawyers -- in effect Mr. Nixon, but his lawyers acting on behalf of him -- also approved this access. And Mr. Nixon had the right to be present on that occasion. Another party joined the whole case, and that was President Ford, and his agent was Philip Buchen, who was counsel to the president, and for all intents and purposes, Philip Buchen took complete control of what happened. And although administratively I
reported to the administrator of GSA, Philip Buchen, who was of course in the West Wing of the
White House and using his deputy, Bill Casselman, they gave me my day-to-day sort of
marching orders, and nothing much happened without their approval. They’re the ones who
participated in the negotiations, which I will tell you about shortly, that then occurred between
the special prosecutor and the Nixon lawyers, and the Justice Department was on the periphery.
Well, I went over there the very same day in October -- approximately the 22nd of October -- and
with the help of a lawyer from GSA by the name of Steven Garfinkel, we wrote a set of
regulations which were published within a week or so in the *Federal Register*, which told
everyone exactly how they could gain access to the materials. They had to come and contact me.
I then in turn had to contact the Nixon lawyers and Mr. Buchen, which I did by talking to Mr.
Casselman. Mr. Nixon’s lawyers were Miller, Larocca and something -- and the principal
partner there was Herbert J. Miller -- everybody called him Jack Miller -- and he was a criminal
lawyer who had been in the Justice Department during the Kennedy administration -- I think he
was a Democrat -- he was considered and still is considered by many people the top criminal
lawyer in Washington. And Nixon had used him for this case and uses him to this day. The
lawyer who did the day-to-day work for Mr. Miller was Stan Mortenson, and Stan Mortenson,
who I think made partnership out of this one case in that firm, is still on that case to this date,
too.

A little sideline on Miller: Miller’s one of the most convincing, effective lawyers I’ve ever met.
We used to have a tremendous number of meetings in negotiating with the special prosecutor and
others for access to the papers and Jack Miller would sit at all of these meetings, and if you
listened to him not too carefully -- or maybe carefully -- it always sounded like he was saying "Yes" to everybody, and he was so pleasant. And when the meeting was all over and you went back to your office and said, "What do I have to do now?" And you thought about what did Miller really say, he had always said "No." And it was very interesting how very convincingly he did that.

Anyway, we wrote the regulations, had them published in the *Federal Register*. We went to the Congress immediately and got an appropriation to set up this office, which was called the Office of Presidential Materials. I had an administrative staff of four people, and then I had the archivists, who had been working on these papers, and were put under my control. There had always been an office in the White House to collect the president's papers during his term in office and then move them to his archives or to his presidential library at the end of his term in office. And this office had always been under the control of the Archivists of the United States and had always been staffed by archivists. And a fellow by the name of Jack Nesbitt was in charge of it, and I took control from him. Jack was transferred to another job. And the six lower level archivists who were working for him came under my control and direction. And we put some order into some of the papers that needed to be sorted, we stored away new papers as they came in, and we did really the same work for a short period of time that the archivists had been doing previously, which was to collect all of Richard Nixon's papers in one location. And that one location was approximately 20 or more rooms including the famous Indian Treaty room, which is a huge room which has now been restored, but which at the time was used entirely for storage of Nixon papers. And I'll step back just briefly and explain why they were all up on the
fourth floor. There is a huge filing section, called Central Files, at the White House that is operated by a permanent staff of people that stay from president to president, and when a new president comes in, those files are totally cleared out, so that you start with a completely empty set of file rooms, and the new president starts filing his papers. And so the day Mr. Nixon left, they had to clear that out, and since he left unexpectedly, and there was no repository for these papers to be shipped to until the Sampson/Nixon agreement which I mentioned before, they were simply moved up to some empty rooms they had on the fourth floor of the Old Executive Office Building and where there weren’t empty rooms, people just were moved out to make room for these papers. And between August, when the president left -- I don’t remember the exact date, maybe it was the 9th -- and October 22nd or 23rd when I took control of the papers, access to those papers had been very loose, which was one of the concerns of both the Reporters Committee and other people, even Mr. Nixon. People had been able to walk in -- particularly lawyers -- and say, “Oh, I need this and this document. Do you know where it is?” And they’d been able to find the document and they’d either been able to borrow it or photostat it, mostly borrow it. And the Archives had lost control of what was happening to documents.

Hedrick: Do you think that there were any documents lost during that period?

Wolf: I have absolutely no idea. It is possible. Now I will say that the Dean and Haldeman documents -- Dean, Haldeman and Ehrlichman documents were kept in a separate room, actually on the fifth floor of the Old Executive Office Building, which had special security with television cameras on it and so on. And I believe those, which are some of the key papers, were totally secure. In addition, all the papers which President Nixon had seen with his own eyes or had put notations on were filed in something called the Special Files, which were kept in a huge safe --
huge walk-in safe the size of this room or even a little larger -- and this room must be about 15 by 15 at least -- under the supervision of a woman by the name of Trudy Fry, who has now retired, but who stayed through the Ford administration and then for some time. And they were totally secure, and I'm sure none of those-- that she took such pride in guarding -- those were papers that were either particularly sensitive or which President Nixon had seen with his own eyes or put notations on. I repeat that, because that's very important -- those were called the Special Files, and they were the most sensitive of the files. So to answer your question, I think that those files have all been carefully protected and the special guardians like Trudy Fry who were in charge of those documents -- see, those Special Files had not been turned over to the Archives yet and they were not moved when Ford came in, interestingly enough, they kept that that way. If any of them were removed, she either made copies for those people and kept the original or did something else to get a certified copy.

Almost immediately after I took control of this operation -- I would say around November 9th -- the special prosecutor came to an agreement with the Nixon people and the White House that he would have access to these materials in order to get information and evidence they needed for the prosecutions that were then underway against everyone except President Nixon, who had been pardoned by that time, of course. I think the President was pardoned the first week in September of 1974. And the negotiations -- although the agreement was reached on this access -- the negotiations as to how these would occur were protracted, to say the least. Obviously the Watergate Special Prosecutor wanted an open-door policy by which he could work his way through the materials and search whatever he wanted, and the Nixon lawyers volunteered to do
the searching for them, and neither one were satisfied with that solution. And as time went by, interestingly enough, both parties came to the conclusion that the one person they could trust to do this was myself and my staff. And I need to step back and explain why this trust was built up.

In the regulations that we wrote at the very beginning for access, I wrote into those that the papers would never be accessed unless there was an administrative person and an archivist there, and the court order called for Mr. Nixon and the White House both to be represented. And I enforced that very carefully and was so good about calling the Nixon people and the White House people from the very beginning, whenever somebody requested access, that within weeks -- two or three weeks -- after I took over, the Nixon lawyers made me their agent, and the White House made me their agent. But nevertheless, we always had an archivist and an administrative person. I was an administrative person and I had, eventually, an assistant whose name was Betty Karabatsos, who was my deputy, and if I wasn’t there, then she acted as the administrative person. And I had the only key, and when I went home at night, I put it in a safe to which only I had that combination. And after Betty had worked with me for several weeks, and she had all the same high clearances that I did, then she got the combination for the safe so she could also get the key, and I took the first leave I’d had in months. Before that I was on a seven-day call with a beeper on me, and I would get called in on Saturdays and Sundays to open up the rooms and find materials.

The second part of the regulations that we put in was that if a lawyer was entitled to some
materials, and some courts required the original, but we made that incredibly difficult. What we would give them was a certified copy, which most courts would accept. But in any event, anything that somebody wanted, before they got it, we made four copies of it, and one copy was sent to Mr. Nixon to make sure they didn’t want to exercise executive privilege. One copy was given to Mr. Casselman of the White House General Counsel’s office, and he was supposed to look at it from the point of view of national security. The third copy was our permanent file copy on which we put notations as to what we had done, and the fourth copy, which was completely clean yet -- nobody had put notations on it -- would then be given to the person who had made the request when the other two copies came back.

And this procedure is very important, because we used that in the searches, as I will explain shortly. Even though everybody came to an agreement early in January or maybe February, we didn’t actually start these searches until March, and this whole operation is described in very, very loose terms in a book called, *The Watergate Special Prosecution Task Force Report*, which was published in October, 1975, and it says that we did this operation between February and August, but my own memory and notes indicate that we didn’t actually get started until March.

What we did is quite interesting, and this resulted from all the negotiations between Herb Miller and Mortenson for Mr. Nixon and the special prosecutor, who was Henry Ruth, and then later on, Chuck Ruff. But most of these negotiations were done by Henry Ruth and his assistants, a fellow by the name of Peter Kreindler (whose family founded and owned the famous 21 Club in NYC), and some other people. Those names are all in this book of which you should have a
copy. This is my only copy, but you should have a copy of this in the archives, it sort of ties
everything together.

Hedrick: I don’t know if we do or not.

Wolf: What we did first was, we prepared an index file -- a list, an index list I guess they call it --
of all the files that we had and all the files that were in the Special Files that Trudy Fry kept.
And what we did is we had two archivists working, and one archivist would read off the name of
the file and another archivist would write it down. And these lists of all the files that existed --
we didn’t open the file, we didn’t see what was in it -- only what the title of the file was. And
there were some very exciting titles, like one said, “Eighteen-minute Gap” and another one said,
“Washington Post” and all kinds of things, which turned out to be much less exciting than the
title led us to hope for. For instance, the “Eighteen-minute Gap” folder, which of course the
special prosecutor later had us look inside of, turned out to be nothing but a clip from the
Washington Post, about the eighteen-minute gap! And a lot of things like that. We then
submitted these lists to the special prosecutor -- and of course Mr. Nixon and the White House
kept copies of them too -- and the special prosecutor came back some weeks later -- took them
quite awhile -- and they said, “Okay, in connection with this investigation,” and they had some
20 different investigations. Some of the ones that are known about are the milk fund
investigation, the town house investigation -- these were fund-raising things -- and others, which
very honestly, I don’t remember. And we kept absolutely no notes, and I’ll explain that in a
minute. In fact, a day or two before we started this project, all eight of us had to sign
confidentiality statements, which swore us to total secrecy, originally for life, and then at my
suggestion, by hand we wrote in there that we would be permitted to discuss what was in these
materials after they had been released to the public. But since most of us -- well, since I took the position I’ve never talked about them except generically, because I don’t know what’s been released to the public. A lot of it has been released to the public, and some of it will never be released to the public. So what we saw inside the materials, which we saw a lot of, shortly, I have never discussed and I don’t think it’ll be that important anymore. What I’m interested in putting down here for posterity is . . .

Hedrick: And this confidentiality process that’s different from the national security confidentiality process.

Wolf: That’s correct. Mr. Buchen had each of us sign a specific agreement that he had his lawyers and the GSA lawyers prepare, which said that we were being selected for this special project to search these papers on behalf of the special prosecutor, and that we were absolutely prohibited with penalty by -- there would be penalties, severe penalties under an existing law, okay?

So, we gave these file titles to the special prosecutor, and they identified each file that they wanted us to search -- and they didn’t want us to search all of the files -- I don’t remember how many titles we gave them, but let us just say we gave them a thousand titles of files, and they eventually gave us a list of 20 investigations and identified anywhere from one to 20 files that they wanted us to look at in connection with each of those investigations. And we were only to look in the file -- this was the agreement between Nixon and the special prosecutor -- if we opened a file that we were supposed to look at in connection with the milk fund scandal, and there was information in there about something else, we did not take that out and prepare it for
delivery to the special prosecutor.

I say “prepared it for delivery” because a lot of things happened, which I’ll explain in a minute. But we left that in the file. Like if there was something in that file about the town house scandal, but it hadn’t been identified for us to look for. You understand what I’m saying?

Hedrick: I understand, yeah.

Wolf: Then we left it in the file.

Hedrick: So let me be clear about this, and I don’t want to be crass here, but if something was misfiled, it was to the president’s benefit.

Wolf: It was to the president’s benefit. I will say that to my memory, we found almost nothing -- and as a matter of fact, I can’t think of anything today that we found that the special prosecutor had not identified the correct file. Now, there are a lot of files we never looked at, and there may have been material in files we never looked at, but in the files we looked at, there was either nothing of interest to the special prosecutor, or there was something that related to the particular investigation that he had identified that file for. We didn’t find a case like we just described, but it was entirely possible. There was one exception to our instructions, and these came very clearly from Mr. Buchen, who as I say really was overlord on this, and that was, if we found a truly smoking gun, if we found something that really no one had dealt with before, I suppose to be really dramatic -- a planned assassination -- we were supposed to bring that to Mr. Casselman’s and Mr. Buchen’s attention. We did not find any such thing. Okay? So, we continued -- well, we waited for the prosecutor to give us these lists, and once the prosecutor gave us these lists, and Mr. Nixon’s people had had a chance to review those lists -- and I can’t remember whether
they objected to any of them. They may have, as a matter of fact. When all that was completed...it was March by that time, and we started the actual review operation.

This procedure was very interesting. It again happened in a room this size, about 15 by 15, which was stripped of everything except tables just like this and chairs. And each morning, I or Mrs. Karabatsos, if I was not present, and one archivist would go to that file area where we would locate the files we were going to search that day. We would remove those files from that storage place. We would put them on a cart and we would wheel them to Room 403 in the Old Executive Office Building. On that entire trip, to the secure place and to the secure room, we were accompanied by an armed Secret Service agent, a uniformed Secret Service agent they call them. And when we got to the room -- before we went in the room, we took our jackets off. None of the men wore jackets, none of the women wore sweaters with pockets in there; we took those off and hung them on a hook outside. And then we wheeled this cart into the room and the Secret Service man stayed outside the room and prevented any unauthorized person from having access to that room. When we got to the room, the other five archivists were already there -- and they went there every day. Some archivists had leave or so on. There were always three or four of the archivists in the room. And I had one archivist who acted both as an archivist and as an administrative person. Her name was Mary Fillippini. And it’s interesting that she at that time started with me as a GS-5 and today she’s the GS-15 special assistant to the regional administrator in San Francisco, and would probably be the one other person that would have as good a memory on this as I do. She’s somewhat younger than I am, and she’ll be around for awhile. But she’s still in the federal government, and she was a remarkable young lady with a
wonderful memory and great ability to organize papers. And she would distribute the papers, keeping track of which archivist got what. One of the interesting by-products of this operation was we created more paper than we looked at!

Hedrick: I can believe it.

Wolf: We started with four million pieces of paper, and I said, we made four copies of each one that we removed for any reason, so we created a lot of documents. But we really acted very carefully, and the other archivist, just for the record, was a fellow by the name of Terry Good, who today is the person who’s in charge of all the presidential files in the White House; he doesn’t work for the Archives anymore, he’s worked for the White House now since about 1975. He became the third assistant for this filing group, which consists of about 30 or 40 people who take care of all the presidential papers, and then he moved up to second assistant and principle assistant and for the last five or six years he’s been the manager of that operation. He’s now about 50 years old and I expect him to be there another 10 to 15 years. And a fellow by the name of Dick McNeil and a young lady by the name of Sally McCarthy and a man by the name of Mack Teasley, and a young lady by the name of Regina Greenwell. And they were the archivists who then sat in that room and with me or Betty Karabatsos supervising them in terms of -- we were present representing the administrative part of it, and we looked at files too, and always when an archivist found something they thought was relevant, they would show it to us and make sure that it was relevant. And then when we found a document that was relevant to what the archivist was -- not the archivist, I’m sorry -- the Watergate prosecutor was looking for, we would identify it as such and mark that whole file and put that file on the cart, which was empty at that point.
At some point during the day, usually around three o’clock or so in the afternoon, we would take that cart, only with the documents that needed to be photostated, and again, with our special Secret Service uniformed guard, would go to a secure copying location, which had been set aside for us -- we did not have our own copying equipment in that room. As I remember, neither the Nixon people nor the special prosecutor wanted a machine in there. And we would then make four copies, as I had mentioned before, of this document, and then, as I said, it would come back, and Mary Fillippini was responsible for marking one for the Watergate prosecutor, but that copy would be held, because the Watergate prosecutor would not get his copy until we received back the copy that we were first going to give to the Nixon people and to Mr. Casselman so they could check it for executive privilege and national security. So it was a very slow and ongoing operation, and then all these papers every night would go back into the files where they normally were. Nothing was kept out overnight. And the materials that we had copied went into the safe in that room; we did have a safe in that room and they went in there, as I remember. We also had a safe in my office, but as I remember, we put it in a safe in that room, and that room was a secured room.

Hedrick: Do you feel and did you get the impression that the president’s attorneys would use the process to frustrate the special prosecutor?

Wolf: Oh, I think Nixon’s lawyers definitely wanted to slow up the special prosecutor. They were not particularly eager to assist him, but I think they recognized they had an obligation to make it possible for the prosecutor to do his job. And I think the main reason that Buchen had Casselman review all of the materials was more to keep himself informed as to what the special
prosecutor was getting than from a point of view of national security. That’s my own feeling.

Hedrick: Okay.

Wolf: Now while all this was going on, and I can’t give you many of the details of this, but the special prosecutor had also made a list -- had just gotten a list -- which we may or may not have prepared for him, of all the tapes, and they had given Buchen and Casselman a list of the materials they wanted from the tapes. And Casselman had the job of listening to the tapes. And to the best of my knowledge, Bill Casselman at that time was the only person who ever listened to the tapes, and he listened to them -- as you know, certain tapes were given by court order to the special prosecutor -- and Bill Casselman listened to those tapes, again ostensibly for national security reasons, and again, in my opinion, because Buchen wanted to be certain that Ford -- I mean, he was protecting Mr. Ford, and he wanted to be sure that they knew what it was that the special prosecutor was getting ahold of, so they wouldn’t get backsided by any surprises. I don’t know that anyone in Buchen’s office was particularly interested in protecting Mr. Nixon. They had pardoned him, and nothing much could happen to Nixon.

And I don’t know that they cared about any of Nixon’s assistants, I think, as far as Buchen and Ford’s White House was concerned if those were ones that were found guilty and sent off -- would be guilty and sent off to wherever they were sent off to. They were looking out to protect themselves and of course they had kept a lot of Mr. Nixon’s staff. My guess is they wanted to be sure none of those people were involved in any of the things that were coming to light, and to my knowledge, that didn’t happen. I mean I don’t remember any scandals. This operation continued -- searching these documents -- until about August, and then we had finished it. In the process
we first did the files that were in certain rooms -- very few of those the Watergate prosecutor was interested in -- then we did the ones in the Haldeman and Dean and Ehrlichman files which I told you were kept in a separate place. And finally, we did the ones in the Special Files; we saved those for last, because those were obviously the most sensitive. As I said that many of the index files were -- the titles that we had on the index file lists -- were very misleading and were not so exciting.

My own opinion was that -- and at one point, I would say, because I reviewed everything that each of the archivists reviewed -- I probably had seen more of the presidential materials than Richard Nixon himself. And until Frank Gannon, the fellow that helped Nixon write his first book, had access to all the materials, no one had seen as much as I had. That happened at the end of 1975 as I remember. He came in from San Clemente. He had been working for Nixon out there. And he went to work on research. Nixon negotiated with the special prosecutor that this fellow would have access, and we provided him with materials every night, and he worked every day, he worked in a special secure room. And we kept careful track of what he got and made sure we got it back. That was Mary Fillippini again, doing her job. And he obviously got to see more than anybody. I think he saw many more than Nixon. But up to his coming on the scene, probably our little group saw more materials than Mr. Nixon himself, and I may, for a short period of time, have seen more than anyone at all.

The thing that impressed most of us was there were a lot of materials that had been dictated by Mr. Nixon on dictaphone belts, and Rose Mary Woods had transcribed these. And the belt was
attached to the transcription. And we read a lot of those. And these were Nixon’s private thoughts, like the night he came back from the Lincoln memorial, he dictated a belt. You’ve heard of that famous night... 

Hedrick: Mm-hm, yes.

Wolf: ... When he spoke to the dissidents. And we really were impressed by what a brilliant man Richard Nixon was. I mean now the world has come to that recognition. That whether or not he was as honest or as good a person as he should have been, he was a great person and a brilliant thinker, especially in international affairs, and in many domestic matters too. But we, at that early stage, back in ‘75, were really impressed by his deep thinking and many of his thoughts. And I guess if we were playing a game and you said to me, “Tell me one word that you came away with, from reviewing all those documents,” I’d say, “brilliant.” I really believe that Richard Nixon was a brilliant person, also probably somewhat sick. In certain ways his actions were certainly distorted, but in any event, he was a brilliant human being.

I’ve told you the general outlines; I could go on with details for a long time, but I think that’s really probably enough. You may have some questions you want to ask me. I’ve thought about this, and I want to put one thing on this record. And that is, that as a result of doing this job a couple of us on that staff came to the conclusion that we don’t think that Rose Mary Woods did the 18 and 1/2 minute gap, and we think we know who did it. I’ve never divulged it to anyone, and I think the person is dead now. We can’t really prove this, but we think that Fred J. Buzhardt, who was a lawyer for President Nixon, is the one who erased the 18 minutes, and we
think he did it down in Key Biscayne. We found some records that indicated that prior to releasing the tapes, Mr. Nixon took a group of tapes down with him on a vacation -- or whatever he was going down for -- in Key Biscayne. He and Rose Woods and some of his staff went down there to review some of the documents, and they took that tape with them. And while they had the tape down there, Buzhardt took it out one night. We know that happened. Now when he returned it the next morning, whether it had been erased or not, nobody will ever know, or whether Rose Mary Woods did it later. But he certainly had the opportunity to do it, and it is an informal, unofficial opinion which I've never divulged before -- that I think Fred. J. Buzhardt was the one. And I made a note at the time, a long, long time ago. “Fred J. Buzhardt, lawyer, wiped 18 1/2 minutes from tape” on this document, which is something from when they took the depositions from Nixon. And I think I gave those to you; you have them. But on page 18, on the last page, they talk about “When counsel to President Ford recommended to my attorneys a provision calling for automatic destruction of the recordings as of five years from the date of the instrument, I viewed the suggestion strictly as an interim measure to ensure that in the event I died before completing arrangements for a Presidential Library, the White House recordings would not be available for unauthorized public disclosure.” This is Nixon speaking. And I chose -- I mean, you’ve got to remember, there’s 20 years -- I chose that page to make this note to myself.

Hedrick: To yourself. Interesting, interesting.

Wolf: So. Are there any particular things you think I left out?

Hedrick: Well, a couple of -- and maybe not really relevant. How much direct contact did you have with President Nixon?
Wolf: During that period of time I had absolutely no direct contact with President Nixon. He was out in San Clemente, and the person that I had a lot of direct contact with was Rose Mary Woods, who was still in the White House, cleaning up things, getting her own materials out of there, which the government also took -- all of her materials, and we were responsible for safeguarding those. Our unit was. And there was a separate lawsuit that she filed to get release of those papers, and they finally gave her her personal things, like the gifts she brought back from China and some other trips, and so on. But they kept a lot of materials of hers. And some of the presidential gifts were under our safekeeping, and we had some responsibility for getting those packed and getting them either delivered to -- I don't know that we sent any of them to Nixon. We sent a lot of them to the Archives, some went, under the foreign gifts act, to the safe in the Forrestal Building, where they keep all the foreign gifts that are supposedly turned in by high government officials who receive these foreign gifts and who must accept them -- that's protocol -- but who cannot keep them if they have a value of -- it used to be $50, then it went to $100. I don't know what it is now.

I had a lot of contact with Rose Woods. Subsequently, when I left the White House, I continued my friendship with Rose Woods, who I found a remarkable woman, and what I guess I admired most about her, in addition to the fact that she was very bright, and very efficient, is her loyalty to Mr. Nixon. Rose Woods, by the way, was originally a Democrat from Ohio, and she told my wife and me an amusing story, which would be interesting for posterity. The way she got to work for Richard Nixon was she worked for an Ohio congressman who was a Democrat. And she was his secretary. And he didn't get reelected. And she was walking around the corridor one
day, after he didn’t get reelected, and a friend of hers said, “Why are you so sad? You look awful.” She said, “Well, my congressman didn’t get reelected. I haven’t got a job!” And this friend said, “Oh, a congressman just got elected from California, and I know he’s going to be looking for a secretary. His name is Richard Nixon.” And that is how she happened to tie up with Richard Nixon and become almost as famous as he did. So she was originally a Democrat, and Rose Woods is back in Ohio now, and I think probably has cancer and is not well at all, and one of these days we’ll hear that she’s died. And with her will go the secret as to whether she is or is not responsible for the 18 1/2-minute gap. My own theory is that she’s not.

After I left the White House, I became a member of something called the February Group, which is a group of people who worked for Richard Nixon in one way or the other. And to this day the February Group meets twice a year in Washington for cocktails, and a lot of people have been allowed to join it now who’ve never worked for Richard Nixon, but who are Republicans or friends of people who worked for Richard Nixon. But originally people like Kissinger and Col. Jack Brennan and Rose Woods and so on all were members of this group, and through that group I’ve had some contact with Richard Nixon. I was invited to the dedication of the Nixon Library and as a group we went -- February Group people, about a hundred of us went -- and Richard Nixon had a fabulous reception for us the night before the opening of the Library, and we all had a chance to speak to him privately for about 30 seconds. And then I was invited to his funeral, which unfortunately, I did not attend. Again I think because I’m a member of the February Group, that was the reason. And I’ve become an Associate of the Nixon Library and have contact with John Taylor, who is director of the Library. And so I was always on the Nixon
mailing list, to get his foreign policy speeches and recommendations and comments, some of which made it into the press and some of which didn’t. As I’ve expressed already, I’m aware of Mr. Nixon’s shortcomings, but over all, I’m an admirer of him as a president, and I think history will show that he was great a president, and it’s too bad that he didn’t handle the Watergate matter better.

[Tape 2 Side 1 Ends]