

Hello everybody and welcome again to another episode of Presidential Archives Uncovered--the podcast that brings to you cool clips from the Presidential Libraries of the U.S. National Archives.

The audio this week is a bit longer than normal, but I think you will find it interesting. In this exit interview conducted on June 18, 1986, President Reagan's speechwriter Peggy Noonan talks about how she came to work in the White House and what that experience was like.

Peggy Noonan Exit Interview
Special Assistant to the President in the Office of the Speechwriters

Interview Date: 6/18/86
Ms. Noonan's office, OEB

Tape 1: Side A

Q: Starting off with the first question that I ask everybody, when did you join the White House staff?

PN: I joined the White House staff on April 2nd, 1984. That was my first day here.

Q: How was it that you came to join the White House staff? Who called you up, who asked you, wrote you a letter?

PN: OK. I was working at CBS News as a producer in New York. My regular daily job was to write a commentary show for the anchorman Dan Rather. This commentary show had a certain -- Dan is known as a sort of liberal ... liberal journalist -- but this particular commentary show had a sort of a conservative following. Because as its writer I ... I ... well I couldn't help but reflect some of my views, you know ... and that was fine with Dan, he thought it was cool ... anyway, one of the fans of the show was a fellow named Joe Sobrin, who worked over at the National Review in New York -- Bill Buckley's magazine -- Joe used to come into CBS to ... to work as a commentator on a little opinion show that the radio network had every week, and Joe started to come in and he'd heard some of my work and he'd talked to technicians and they'd say "Gee you oughta know this person," so he and I became friends. He looked me up one day in an office and we became friends. He was my first conservative friend. And I always used to tell him "Gee I'd love to work for Reagan, I'd love to write for him," I was very happy writing for Dan -- you know Rather's a nice guy -- but I really felt I had a calling to write for Reagan. But I knew it wasn't going to happen because I had no connections, I had no Republican Party background, I had no political credentials whatsoever ... I'd been working as a journalist for about 8 years, and because I was a journalist I never became formally aligned with any political party. So ... and I knew this was a highly political place that would probably check you out. You know, find out if you were at least were a

Republican, and I didn't even know if I was registered, I think I was an independent. So I knew it would never work out. But I'd tell Joe this now and then, and Joe would tell his friends. It was about '81 that he and I met. Late in '83, early in '84 the White House started looking for a speechwriter. They had lost someone months and months before, and they needed someone special for '84 because the campaign was coming, the election was coming. Big European trips were coming, D-Day was coming. And Dick Darman was sort of ... very eager to get somebody and get somebody good. Ben Elliot, who was the Director of the Speechwriting Office and the Chief speechwriter had spent considerable time calling all around, conservative groups and organizations trying to find out, geez, who can you recommend, who'd be interesting. Called National Review one day and he spoke to Joe Sobrin and a fellow named Kevin Lynch. Kevin and Joe both said "Call Peggy Noonan at CBS." And normally a Deputy Assistant to the President in the Reagan administration would laugh over "call so and so at CBS", but Ben did not because Ben had worked at CBS 10 years before and he understood that you can be quite conservative and work there and even work there quite happily. So he gave me a call one day. And I still have the message ... I still have the pink slip that says "Ben Elliot called from the White House." And as I picked this up after lunch from my secretary I thought "He probably runs speechwriting and he's probably going to offer me a job and my life is going to change." I just knew it immediately. Boom. That happened to me recently on another job, just six weeks ago I got another phone call, and I thought "this is it, I'm leaving here." So Ben and I started to talk, and he and Dick Darman read everything – they asked me for everything I've ever written, which I figured was hyperbole – they couldn't want everything. They wanted everything. And they got everything I'd written since college. I mean I sent it down here in big bundles, and they read my stuff. I'd written this one speech for Dan Rather, they read that speech, they had sections of it memorized. After they got the first bundle they asked me to come down and they interviewed me and I spent some time with Ben – not Darman that time – and I sent Ben more of my material and he asked me to come back again a few weeks later and speak to him and Dick Darman. And my interview with Darman was really delightful and interesting. And when I was in New Hampshire, in Manchester New Hampshire, covering the New Hampshire primary, 1984 primary, in February of '84, I got the formal job offer from Ben by phone, and I said "You know, I'm gonna say yes but could you give me a few days just to think about because I love to think about things ... I like to have fun," and he said "Okay, as long as the answer is really yes," I said "Of course it's yes, but I'm not telling you formally for a few days." Then I spent all throughout the New Hampshire primary talking to people at CBS like Bill Moyers and saying "Well I've been offered this job, what do you think?" and Bill would say "Well what do you want to do," and I'd say "Well I want to take the job, but what do you think?" (laughter) as if it was really an open question, and I had wonderful conversations with Dan and with Bill, and told them all I be taking it, and then called Ben and told him I'd take it, and then just came down here.

Q: What did they tell you when you came down here as to what you would be doing, Peggy? How did they describe the Speechwriter's operation in the Reagan White House under Ben Elliot?

PN: Well, Ben had grown bald doing this job ... it took a lot out of him. And I can remember him when I first asked him "how does this place exactly work?" he'd sort of put his hand through his hair, you know (laughter), and tear at the follicles ... he was a very frustrated fellow. Um...it was clear to me that a speechwriter writes speeches – I knew I'd be doing that – beyond that I wasn't sure. I would ask you know "will we meet with the President?" and I would never really be given a direct answer. "Who do I have to answer to?" No direct answer. "Do a lot of people see the speeches before it goes to the President?" Well some people do, mumble ... but it's a reasonable process ... mumble." So I knew that there would probably be some problems just because there were so many questions that I asked before I came in, that I was still asking once I'd been here two weeks. You know? I think I lost a little track of your question.

Q: OK. What did they tell you about how the operation worked? Now, perhaps if they didn't tell you anything before you came down maybe you should just jump into the ... to answer the question "how did it work while you were here?"

PN: I was astonished at first. It was ... I was just astonished at the way it works here. When I came in. I was in shock for about 3 months. Um...the way it works is this: I as the speechwriter am assigned a speech. Right? It will take place at a certain time, at a certain location, the subject will probably be a certain thing, to a certain group. You know? I would take this assignment, and to my shock more or less as a rule, make it up. I always thought members of the administration would probably come to me and say "Peg, this is what we ought to do," you know? And it didn't happen. And I was...I was shocked by this. I was also shocked that uh ... so what I'd wind up doing was going to the guy around the office and saying "look, I don't know what to put in this speech," and he'd give me ideas. He'd say "well, it's for this political conservative group, and they've been upset that ...that we haven't talked about tax reform here in the past two years, so why don't you try to talk about tax reform because they'll like it..." And then Ben would say, "But so and so here won't like it, but we'll try to get it past him." So I'd start to ... do you know what I mean ... in a way I felt like I was operating in a void. In an input void, although I did also get the impression that even though I was not getting sufficient input, I became aware that I'd certainly be confronted with more than sufficient output. So no matter what you put in a speech, no matter what the sentence was, it was guaranteed to have 3 enemies. And the enemies would tend to be much more vocal than the 5 friends. You know the 5 people who liked that sentence, they'd take it home and read it to their wife, they thought it was wonderful. But the guys who didn't like it would, you know, really come down hard. So I was shocked by the lack of input, I was shocked that we did not meet with the president, and I was shocked...that speeches were so widely staffed... meaning, when I did a speech it would be sent out to 25 groups and individuals throughout the administration, and they'd all get to comment with their little opinions. And I don't mean necessarily political opinions although sometimes I do ... I mean frequently stylistic opinions. I had secretaries sometimes rewriting sentences because they liked it better their way. So I was ...as a...as a professional writer, who had a reputation in New York as a good writer, and who felt that she was a good writer and who was hired because she was a good writer, I was stunned by what people were doing

to my work. And I was ... started to pull my hair out ... I almost went bald too. And I was also stunned finally ...by ... by the ... the enormous power of a small group of individuals ... Dick Darman had the final say on a speech. Now I came in here assuming the President did, but it was really Dick – for all intents and purposes – for practical purposes it was Dick. Jim Baker of course had input that was never ignored. If he said “I don’t like that section,” it was out – there was no appeal – it was out. Um...Mike Deaver. ... Those, I guess, 3 people.

Q: How about Meese’s shop? You’ve mentioned the other 2 members in the triumvirate ...

PN: Yeah.

Q: How about Meese’s shop ... did they get involved in the speeches?

PN: Well, you know it was never clear to me my first year here what Meese’s shop was or who Meese’s shop was. Honestly, but ... Ed Meese himself never once called me or wrote me a note about a speech ... he never got in my hair in any way or assisted me in any way. He seemed really very much out of that. I think Jack Svahn was working for him then, am I correct?

Q: Yes.

PN: And Jack would always make comments now and then ... but I learned I could ... I didn’t have to respond quickly to them. I could sometimes ignore them. I could frequently, I guess I felt, ignore them. What it took me 6 months to figure out here was who you had to listen to and who you didn’t have to listen to. I mean it took me 6 months to figure out you didn’t have to listen to the secretaries. It took me 6 months to figure out we have people at NSC who major in say, Eastern European affairs. Who fancy themselves writers and so who would make stylistic changes. It took me a ... it took me a while to just get it straight that when it came to the subject of Eastern European affairs I had to listen to them, but when it came to the poetry of rhetoric, I didn’t have to. I didn’t know, I mean I was new, I’d never been in government and I really thought somebody called the “Special Assistant for Bup-da-bup-da-bup” – I thought I had to listen to all of them. You know? And it was really awful for me because...because rhetoric is a form of art. Rhetoric is a soliloquy – you know, it’s part theater, its part political declaration, its part personal communication between a leader and his people ... you know it’s all of this stuff ... anything that is art or part art is delicate, and anything that’s delicate can’t survive the tinkering hands and mauling of 25 people. Um ... So you know I guess after 6 months I guess I was astonished that anything good ever came out of this shop. I thought, in a way this shop is a triumph because it survives ...what ...what these pieces of paper we send out of here have to survive. But anyway it was a tough 6 months. It was tough learning how this place works.

Q: I can’t help but ... let me ask a question that comes to mind at this point ... throughout the time you were writing these speeches did most of them survive fairly intact?

PN: With time, and I mean week after week, people started coming in and saying “oh that was very good,” the ... Harry Truman remarks, that was very good ... oh, D-Day, that was very good. I started to get, as the weeks turned into months a reputation as a reliable person who will do good work. As that reputation spread fewer secretaries corrected my inelegant prose, and fewer of the Jack Svahns gave me their suggestions. So with time ... with time, I did just fine. Darman came to ... Darman never didn't appreciate my work, he always did ... but...but he came to have I think great faith in it after a few months. And Darman, I want to talk about him a little bit because he was something special here in my mind – Darman appreciated literature. You know, government, very understandably, is not full of people who majored in English Lit in college, you know its not full of people who sit up reading John Updike at night, or ...or George Elliot, you know what I mean? It doesn't draw the most literate people, it draws activists. People who want to you know, push the right lever and change things in society. Darman was different in that he was ... in that he was quite literate, so he wound up A.) appreciating my work, but B.) protecting it, pretty much, you know? And so the fights I had and we had with Darman tended to be political. But it wasn't much of a fight, you know I would go to Darman, I'd say “Look, Dick, the president is doing this political appearance at this church in New Jersey, I've been assigned it, we haven't talked about abortion in a year and a half, and this is the perfect place to do it because I have in my hand a copy of the parish newsletter, the lead story here for this week is abortion, it's a very anti-abortion group and I think, you know, we really ought to mention it here.” Now he'd always listen to me and sometimes he'd smile and say “OK, go ahead.” And sometimes he'd say no. And when he said no, there was no “Now Dick,” you know? It was no! But... but it worked. I was astonished by his authority and power. But I was appreciative of the fact that he protected ... he appreciated and protected my prose, and he'd listen to me on political stuff although usually ruled against me.

Q: How is one assigned a particular speech, Peggy? Does Ben Elliot make that decision on his own? And if so how does he do it? Why would he assign a speech to you rather than another member of the speechwriting team?

PN: Uh ... OK that's a two-part question. Who makes the decision? Ben – that's one of the most important things that person does in that office. Um...how does he make the decision? Well I've seen people lobby him. I haven't lobbied Ben much for speeches. But I've seen people say “Oh I really want this because A) it's about NASA, I'm in love with NASA, I have a real gift for writing about space ... B) it's in Florida and I'm from Florida and C.) mom's in the audience ...you know, any number of reasons why people would lobby for a speech... I haven't done that very much. Ben always made those decisions, big decisions, in concert with whoever was the staff secretary. First year I was here it was Darman, second year I was here it was ... well actually, I was wrong ... Ben didn't make the decisions in concert with David Chew he made them in concert with Pat Buchanan. So the...so the head of communications ... and before I was here, Ben made the decision in concert with Dave Gergen, who had the Buchanan job. I guess before the real re-emergence ...the real emergence, rather, of Darman. Um... Look, he made, an

important speech demanded the best writer, right? For that particular subject, and so made his call.

Q: But there are a multitude of people out there, or groups, topics and subjects, and the speechwriters team amounts to what – maybe four or five, six?

PN: Six.

Q: Six. You can't be specialists in all those areas – at best you're generalists. Right?

PN: Well it's interesting how this works. In fact, each administration has done it differently. In the Nixon administration for instance, there were six writers: three senior writers, three junior writers. Bill Safire and Ken Kachigian did economic issues. Buchanan and somebody else did domestic issues. Ray Price and somebody else did ...foreign affairs. So they were specialists. We're different from that. We have six writers here and they're all, all over the map. You know, one day they're writing about the Soviet Union, the next day Graham-Rudman, day after that congratulations to the Celtics in the Rose Garden. So like journalists – journalists always call themselves gifted generalists, and most of the folks here are from journalism – everybody here has functioned as a gifted generalist, although there are those of us who are better at some things than others and those of us who are more incompetent at some things than others. You know? I have been in more than two years here, I've been assigned perhaps three welcome back to the Celtics things and that was only because I was like the only person who walked by when Ben was desperate. But I don't understand sports if it is not baseball. Right? So I'd never do that. But there are others who you could always ask to do that. Dana Rorbacher specializes in arrival and departure remarks, for the arrival of the visiting potentate and the departure of the guy. Dana can do that endlessly. He likes it, you know? So there are habits the director of the office gets into, to always think of certain people for certain things.

Q: What would he think of for you? What kind of speeches would he generally say “Peggy's the one for this because she's good at writing speeches to this type of audience about this type of subject, with this tone...”

PN: Well, Ben always thought of ... Ben ...Ben ...when I came in here Ben was most excited about hiring me because he thought I knew things like poetry. I knew things like literature. He had a bunch of guys here who knew basketball scores – do you know what I mean? So I added another dimension. So that's why he always ... from the beginning he would assign me things like the D-Day speech, do you know what I mean? Because he thought that needed to ... not just sit there as a statement but he thought it needed to soar a little bit, go out there, go beyond a little bit, go beyond the usual and the predictable. So he would think of me for stuff like that. He'd think of me for the Kennedy speech. ... um...but he also, because I take a very very active interest in politics here, he would always think of me for the State of the Union – of the ...the 1985 State of the Union – for the CPAC speech of 1985 which is a real knock-down drag-out political thing. Um, the Executive Forum speech of '85 in which the President – I think its January of '85 – its

right after the election, the president is back from vacation and now he's supposed to fire up the troops. Ben would always think of me – he would always think of me for stuff that had ... a certain emotional ... that needed a certain Ben would think of me when he had a speech that needed to grab people and say "Hey! Listen to me. I'm trying to change your world, I'm trying to change history forever here, you want to help me?" You know? So stuff that would appeal to people's hearts and minds, as they used to say in this place. So that's what he'd think of me for. And, I think at times these guys over here, in the West Wing would think of me as "the girl" who does the emotional things. The girl. They used to call me that.

Q: Did they really?

PN: Regan would sometimes say "Get that girl. That girl. You know, have that girl do that." You know?

Q: That's interesting.

PN: Yeah?

Q: That's interesting. How many speeches might you be working on at any one time?

PN: In 1984, which was a busy, demanding and historic year, I would do, be working on 3 or 4 speeches a week. '85 slowed down a little bit, and '86 was slower still.

Q: How much advance notice would you get on a speech? Would it be 2 or 3 days, would it be 2 or 3 weeks?

PN: An average speech – the JFK fundraiser – I would have a ... oh, 6, 7 days. All right? A lot of stuff here is a little bit last minute, from welcoming back the Celtics to doing a taping for Lew Wasserman's 50th anniversary ... uh ... last minute stuff that scheduling just throws on. So in that case you sometimes have 3 hours. The State of the Union you've got a year. There are a lot of speeches that the President does that he does once a year, that we can expect he does – Executive Forum – so in the beginning of January you know in three weeks you're going to be assigned it, so in a way you've got three weeks lead time. The CPAC speech in March – you know even before you're assigned it that you'll be working on it so in a way you have unlimited lead time. But the average lead time for your average speech is just about a week, week and a half.

Q: The organization of the office itself – with these six speechwriters and your research unit, and the secretaries – does the office get together once a day or once a week to chit-chat about upcoming speeches and what the President and the staff would like the speechwriters to include in their speeches for the next couple of weeks so ... what common theme are we working on this week or anything?

PN: No, and I regretted that and I think it was ... I think Ben was very good at his job and gave good leadership, but I think one of the mistakes he made was not ... was to not ...

um, encourage that sense of esprit that one gets from regular meetings in the sense of being plugged in. I never for a minute felt plugged in. Used to go to lunch ... you know with ... I mostly had as my friends in Washington, journalists, because that's the community I come from, and I'd go to lunch with journalists who cover the White House, and they'd tell me what was going on. And you know what – I'm a speechwriter for the President and I'd never know. There was ... I ... There was too close control, there's too much close control on information in the time I was here. Darman, I think, was not interested in telling Ben what his overall plans were, and Ben did not take the time to sit down with his staff and talk about overall plans. I must admit, I think there was a practical reason that he didn't do that, and it was because he ... didn't always want to use certain speechwriters for certain things, even though those speechwriters were ambitious to do a particular speech and he found it easier just not to tell them that the speech was coming up. So I guess that was a big, you know? Um... Ben was big on meritocracy. Whoever's doing best at the moment, and it... keeps doing best keeps getting the speeches. That's not democratic (laughter), and there are a lot of people here who wanted it to be more democratic, but ... so I think he was sort of dealing with that problem by not having meetings with us. At any rate, I wish we had ... Pat Buchanan now, as the director of communications holds a regular 8:30 meeting, that the head of this office goes to, and I've gone a few times for Ben, maybe 10 times. And he gives all the people at that meeting, the morning line. The read on what the Senior Staff meeting was like, and who said what, and what it is we're pushing this week, and what horse we're off, you know? What dog won't fight (laughter). Um, and what's going on. You know, Barbara Walters is coming in to interview the First Lady, they had a fight, Barbara Walters punched her in the nose, the First Lady threw her out a window, you know Pat always has great stories like that. So uh, ... so there should have been more of that kind of stuff, I think, than there was.

Q: After you were assigned a speech, would you talk not only with Ben but other speechwriters, or would you ... where would you get your input? Would you go to your own research staff here or would you simply do it on your own?

PN: Ultimately I just wound up doing a real lot on my own. I learned who to trust and call up and ask for ideas and advice, and once I did that, and they'd say "well, geez, find this speech that the president did back in 1958. He said the most interesting thing," then I'd ask the researchers to find it. Um... with time I just learned who I thought was really smart and had good sound advice on the National Security Council, in a policy capacity, in a political capacity ... you know I'd just find people I thought had good sense.

Q: Would you often go outside the White House and outside the government to get input?

PN: No, only in the area of what I'd read. Not in ... you know I don't really like to talk to people. Do you know what I mean? I don't like to call up people like at the Education Department and ask them questions – I just ... I don't like that stuff. So I would be much more inclined to ask a researcher to call education, find out who to talk to, and find out what they should send to me ... you know written material. So that's how I'd operate.

Q: How many drafts would you get through, Peggy, before you were ready to submit it to Ben?

PN: Uh ... the Point du Hoc address was fifteen drafts.

Q: Now, the Point du Hoc is the one on the Normandy Beach?

PN: On the cliffs. Right.

Q: How many drafts?

PN: Fifteen. Easy.

Q: Fifteen drafts before you ever showed it to anybody?

PN: Yep. But I ... but I'm a ... I don't show people my work until it's really cooked, you know? So when I showed it to Ben, Ben changed 5 words and then said to go off. So it was done by the time I got it to Ben. But uh ... but on my own I'd done about 15 drafts. And then, once it went through the process I had to do about 5 more. So in all, that was my most ever. That was my first really big speech and I wanted it to be really good. And I was a little bit paralyzed because I had the ambition to make it great, but I'd been here two months which was just long enough to understand just how many enemies any given speech had, and I hadn't been here long enough to have a wide reputation as a good writer so I knew I was gonna be in trouble. You know? So it was a very tough speech for me to work on. The conditions were pretty awful.

Q: Were there ...

PN: But it all turned out okay.

Q: Were there any drafts that you whipped off the first time through and said that's it, that's what I want to say, and went off with it?

PN: The JFK fundraiser in McLean which was last summer, was uh ... first draft was almost perfect second draft was it – according to me – you know? I just had it knocked. With time I grew more confident as people do, you know, in any given job once they've done it for a while ... and when you become more confident you have fewer drafts ... but I also must admit with time I became so much more aware of what wouldn't fly here and so I inhibited myself artistically. And by deliberately inhibiting myself I made it easier for myself. That meant 5 fewer drafts on everything, you know? Because if you don't inhibit yourself you take leaps. Some leaps will be mistakes. You know, and so you've got to change the whole thing around,

Tape 1
Side B

PN: ... limits to what the president can and...and will be comfortable saying, but more to the point, limits to what those around the president are comfortable having him say. Also little stylistic things ... this is a small point ... but when I was new here one of my first campaign speeches, I had the president do a funny thing that was really spirited. It was spirited and sort of FDR. I was gonna have him ... he was talking before a big working class audience down south, and the Democrats were getting out the line that he was getting old, and that it wouldn't be a spirited campaign, and that he'd, you know, probably do a Rose Garden thing ... well I had him loosen his tie a little bit and roll up his sleeves and say some very amusing, feisty things about, sure, what a slow campaign it's gonna be. Well it was loads of fun and everybody who saw liked it, but Dick Darman, got it in his hand, read it, and came over and sat down with me and he said "This is very nice. But I want you to understand that the president is a man who sits at his desk all day and he never loosens his tie. He never rolls up his sleeves and he never even takes his jacket off. Sitting at his desk he never takes his jacket off. He is not a person who does physical things like that and he won't do it. So never do that." And I said "okay." It would have been fun and it sounds like Reagan, and actually I think ... I think to tell you the truth, that if Darman and Baker had said do this – and Deaver – had said "Do this, it's going to be loads of fun," he would have had fun practicing doing it in front of a mirror and had a ball. But, but Darman's read was, it's not his style so I never gave him a physical ... physical cues like that anymore ... I used to when I started here, approached a speech as a script. And I stopped doing that after a while. Because a script does involve certain stage directions and ...

Q: Peggy, as you went through these drafts – I ask this question for the future researchers – did you maintain the previous drafts? Will the researchers in the future be able to go to the Peggy Noonan speechwriting file ...

PN: Sure.

Q: ... and find all the drafts with all the input and the comments ...

PN: It's all there. It's all outside. We keep a copy of every comment from everybody, and every draft ... that's why some of you are gonna see, or the researchers of the future will see that some of these files are about half a foot, a foot thick sometimes. The State of the Union thing is probably three files each about 8 inches wide.

Q: Did you find that you were more creative at different times during the day, you know, some people write better ...

PN: Oh you know what they will miss out on? Some people report by phone, and I would frequently write down their notes, and then throw the notes away. Do you know what I mean, just incorporate what they wanted but sometimes ... the researchers of the future will not necessarily know who mandated what change, because I didn't put the initials of the person ... you know ...

Q: They will at least know that this ... phrase or this sentence or this paragraph is different from the previous draft simply by comparing the two ... they may not be able to ...

PN: Yep.

Q: ... understand why it was modified,

PN: Yep.

Q: ... but they'll know that it was.

PN: You bet.

Q: Okay. Well. How about ... at what point in the day were you generally more creative than others, were you a one of these day people, one of the night people, ... or were you one of these who could write 24 hours, and ... never miss a beat regardless of what time of day it was? Are you one of these who can go on and on and on without becoming totally exhausted?

PN: Writing makes me nervous and I'm always afraid to write. I'm always afraid of the challenge of writing a speech. It's really horrible for me to start. So I tend to write best when I'm close to deadline and I have no choice but to do it. I used to get about two cups of coffee and a pack of cigarettes and sit down and just force myself to plunge in. And sometimes I'd try to fool myself into thinking it wasn't really a speech, it was a letter. And I'd write "Dear Peggy," and then I'd start the speech. Or "dear somebody else," ... sometimes I'd pick other people. And so it didn't matter so much what time of day... although I am ... I'm stupidest after lunch. See, I can remember writing pretty well in the morning, in 1984, when I was under great pressure to keep getting it out. You know keep getting material out. I remember writing well in the morning, but I can also remember writing pretty well at 9 pm... um...that was the year when I didn't usually get out of here until 10 pm. So I guess ... once I got past the fear, and the ... the inhibited sense of "Oh my God, I'm going to fail," timing didn't matter, I guess what I'm saying ... psychology did. After naps I'm better I guess. I nap a lot (laughter).

Q: Would you be one of those who would be constantly calling the research unit to say "find this quote, or whatever, to help me out, I know somebody said this, and I'd like to...?"

PN: I don't know compared to ... oh yes, I've ...I've driven some researchers crazy with "I know so and so said this, and I know I read it as a child, it's about 1962," ...um... so I would .. I would drive them a little bit crazy, but I must say, I ... because they had ... researchers have to ... everything I would quote they would have to find it literally and stare at it. You know? And check it off on the speech once they got the book, you know, the Scott Fitzgerald book. But I read a lot as a kid and you know you remember a lot between say 10 and 20 ... your mind ...your memory ... the vault is emptier than it is

between 20 and 30 right? So I collected a lot of stuff, some great and some garbage. And now and then I'd pull it out and put it in a speech and the researchers couldn't find it. You know, it was a Scott Fitzgerald, it was a letter to Sarah Murphy. You know, he wrote it about 1931, and they could never find it. So I stopped doing that after a while, even though I knew I was right – he really said that in the letter – you know? So I ... after a while I think I stopped driving them crazy, but now and then I'd still ... You know it's gets silly, research ... in the JFK speech I said I can remember this at the time, a shopkeeper in New York, the day Kennedy was buried, closed his shop as many did – most did, 90 percent – and put up a little sign that said “Closed because of a death in the family.” It was a nice little thing, it was in a picture in the New York newspapers. One of them that day. Well I put that in the JFK speech and a researcher comes to me and says “I can't find that.” Well you know what, she can't, it's true ... she can't go up to New York and go through every old Daily News and if it's not that it's the New York Times. And it was at that that I just threw up my hands and went to Agnes Waldron, who was the head of the researchers, and I said “Agnes, this happened. Okay? It just happened. Now we can't find it but it really happened. Not only did it happen, but no one will ever ask.” Because ... do you know what I mean? 'Cause it not only happened but it sounds like it happened. You know, and everybody knows, everybody has a similar memory. Well Agnes just laughed after a while and she said “Well okay, we'll let it go,” and that ... yeah (laughter) ... but you know, you can get ... it's good to be correct, it's good to be factually correct but you shouldn't get hidebound in an impossible way. And I felt sometimes we were.

Q: Did you do any traveling?

PN: Yeah. I had a ... I traveled twice during the campaign, great college trips. I traveled, once up to New Jersey, for a little political event – this was after the campaign – it was just last summer. I traveled to Europe twice – once for the Bonn Economic Summit of 1985, and once for the Geneva Summit with Gorbachev in November of '85. I don't think I've taken a trip since then.

Q: The Point du Hoc speech – were you present for that?

PN: I wasn't because I was new here and I had no right to ... it's a very ... a much sought honor to go on a trip if you're in speechwriting, and ... the person who runs the office is the one who always went on them and they used to have to fight to have any other speechwriter go. I think the first one who went on big trip with him was me the following spring. Um ... I wish I'd ... I watched the Point du Hoc address in New York City in my apartment and I was very disappointed in it because it was not as good as it could have been. You know, I just knew. Everybody else was hearing it for the first time and they thought “hey, this is good,” but of course for me it was the 20th draft, and I knew which draft was really the best one and it was the 11th. And I'm still irritated ... there was a 20 minute window that the networks had for this speech ... they all were giving it 20 minutes. Mike Deaver and the Advance folks got it into their mind that this speech had to be like an 8 minute speech, so it had to be cut more than in half, from the best version down to the final version. And that ... and that did not help the speech. But still the

speech was so good going in that became a hit (laughter). But you know, it's a ... speechwriters always bitch because they always know which one is really the best. Because they've seen it. Not everybody else has seen the sausage while it's being made. So you have ... it gives you a rather twisted sense of what works and what doesn't.

Q: Were you ever interviewed by newspapers or magazines Peggy, while you were here?

PN: Yeah, by Esquire magazine, by US News and World Report, the Washington Post,

Q: Were those extensive articles ...

PN: Elle magazine, and I'm sure some others.

Q: Okay. ... those were interviews with you specifically, and so a researcher in the future would be able to find those interviews in those magazines or papers ...

PN: Sure.

Q: ...it would help tell more about you and what you did here.

PN: You bet.

Q: I always ask members of the staff, was there any such thing as a typical day – I think what you've told me today indicates that there probably isn't but go ahead and answer that question. Was there a typical day for you? Would you come in at a particular time, would you leave at a particular time?

PN: I'd come in later, than uh...well I'd come in not late for a speechwriter, but late for a government person. You know? I'd come in late for someone who works at the EOB. When I first came here it was like a scandal that I'd show up at 9:30 or quarter of 10:00, but my feeling was ... you know, I'm kind of sleepy and dumb at 8 am so why be here? And I'd stay till 10 pm so I figured ah, it's all right its okay... everybody else goes home at 6 or 7 pm. But ... um ... I'd come in later than most people, and read the papers. If I was in in time I'd watch Phil Donohue on TV, while I read the papers. It's always good to know what ... there are certain things in the media that its good to know about, you know, just to know what America is buzzing about ... Phil Donohue is one, Johnny Carson's monologues is another, any one of the network news shows, and the most popular situation comedies and movies. So in the morning I'd watch Phil Donohue if I was in in time, after that I'd watch the 700 Club, because I like it, because it was always, you know ... wonderful stories about people who got saved, and I just love those stories, they make me very happy. Uh ... so I'd read the papers, watch that and talk on the phone with friends and gossip and ... and try to get ready for the speech that I had to write. Then I'd started writing just about an hour before lunch so that I'd have to break for lunch, go to lunch, come back, take a nap, and then I'd really write. Then I'd work hard between, say, 2 pm and 10 pm. – in '84. Between 2 pm and 7 pm in '85 and '86. Um ... there's a lot of phone calls, there's a lot of flak-catching in a speechwriter's job you

know, because you're always getting last minute calls from people who say "I really hate that paragraph, take it out!" or "You said 'all of mankind,' you should have said 'man and womankind,'" Um, ... so you wind up being on the phone a lot, and either being conciliatory or arguing with people. I'd spend a lot of time trying to keep up with my mail, which I never managed to do. When you're a speechwriter, everybody in the administration sends you stuff that you ought to read to get inspired or to give you facts, you know? So the guy you met at the party from the attorney General's office sends you the Criminal Justice Report, and you know you're going to see him at a party again so you try to read it, you know? And you also try to read it because maybe Ben will give me a criminal justice speech. So I'd always try to read that stuff – I'd feel so morally bound to keep up with the inbox and I never did it. I don't think anybody ever really does it. You just gotta get ruthless about your mail and throw most of it away I think. I never returned all my phone calls, you know ... there's a perpetual sense of delinquency ... in ... for me, in speechwriting. Maybe that's in any government job.

Q: You mentioned you read the papers, Peggy. Which papers would you read?

PN: New York Times; Washington Post; New York Post; New York Daily News; Wall Street Journal – when it was pointed out to me that there was something I had to read in there; USA Today, ditto; Washington Times, A) because it's sometimes fun, B) because I was told the president reads it every day, and I always wanted to have a sense of what he was reading ... since we didn't meet with him there were various ways where I'd try to find out what it was he thought and what he was thinking. And when I'd hear, oh geez, he read the Joe Sobrin column and he really liked it, I'd read the Joe Sobrin column and find, you know, try to get a sense of ... what it was that was pleasing the President.

Q: The question of where does semantics and rhetoric stop and where does policy begin, was that a problem during ... for you? Were some of your speeches ... modified by people who said "Hey, you're delving into policy here. You can go so far but you can't go any further," is that a difficult area? Was that a difficult area?

PN: Yeah, it was always crazy in this administration. Dick Darman, at the goodbye party for Ben Elliot said, about two weeks ago, ... he was congratulating Ben on his coolness under fire and for not losing his temper very much, when, in Dick's words, "it was in this administration more than most, that speechwriting became the place where all the strategic, philosophical, political, uh... tensions and disagreements in this administration got worked out. This is where it happened. The word is where it happened." It is impossible ... it is just impossible to separate speech writing from policy. The speech is the policy. The speechwriter makes the policy by making the words. Now the speechwriter obviously is not free to write the words "and so, we will not meet with Gorbachev this year, in fact we'll never meet with the son of a bitch." Right? Never mind that we don't swear in speeches, obviously you can't make up that policy. Whatever the policy is on Gorbachev at any given moment. But, when the president is going to Berlin and he's standing next to the Berlin Wall, it's one thing if the president says – and it's one kind of policy if the president says, "The American people support the German people." It's quite another thing if that president says "I am a Berliner." Okay? Now you

might call that a rhetorical difference between these two statements, but it's not – it's a policy difference. One is your basic statement of support. And the other is “we really mean this – we're really here,” and it is the second type – the “I am a Berliner” one – that communicates to the world the intentions of the United States. That communicates to the Kremlin the intentions, it communicates to the United States its intentions! That's ... it's a policy decision, a highly political decision what kind of words the president uses to make a point. Um ... there is a number of things complicated, this ... it's a fascinating area I think. One thing is that – this has not always been true in every administration, I know personally because I know a bunch of folks who have written for other presidents, but it's true in this administration – what you have in speechwriting is real conservatives who came here because they believed in Ronald Reagan and they came here to advance the conservative agenda. Well that's just fine, that's the type you want in speechwriting. However, that type comes head to head, and butts heads, with ... the folks who are pursuing, as they say in Washington, other agendas, or other agenda. Speechwriters came head to head with those who say, work in the EOB or the West Wing, who were there to advance their own careers, and who wanted to advance their own careers in the most practical sort of way. The most practical sort of way is not to get into ideological disputes, or put the president out saying something ideologically that Dick Wirthlin, our pollster, thinks he shouldn't say, because there's no real support for it. All right? So there's that type. There's the ... so there's the “this is the best job I ever had and I'm gonna become king of the mountain before I leave” type. There's also the type that again, is not here to pursue a political agenda, but is here to make sure that the president survives as a popular president – as we all are – but who thinks the way to do that is to follow the polls. I mean, there are people over there who just follow the polls. Well, that's one way to do it. You might not call it leadership, you might call that “followship.” That's what I'd would tend call it. I think Ronald Reagan is such a huge and magical character that he shapes public opinion. He shapes what will show up in the polls six months from now. Um ... There are folks who are long time bureaucrats who have survived just by ... by not getting involved in any of that political ideological stuff. If I were a headline writer or I wrote for Time magazine, I'd call it the difference between the “true believers,” and the pragmatists, which is what they've tended to call it. But I don't find the other guys to be pragmatic because what is pragmatic is practical, and I've frequently found them to be impractical in their judgment. And disrespectful of the American people. And as for true believers, everybody here in speechwriting is a conservative, but they're all different kinds of conservatives – it's kind of interesting. And they all are here for different reasons. But they're all ... they're here to help change America, I guess. And they wound up naturally head to head with some very different types. And finally, complicating this whole question, is the uh ... the void left by the President's disinterest in such matters, and disinclination to become involved. When Pat Buchanan worked for Richard Nixon, Richard Nixon had real opinions about what would go in his speeches. He was real into it. And he'd play some interesting games, you know, he'd call up Pat Buchanan and he'd say “I want you to do this,” and then he'd call up Ray Price and say “well I want you to do this,” then he'd get both versions sometimes put them together ... you know, he'd do interesting things, but he took a very real involvement. I have never known the President to take such a real involvement. And in the absence of such involvement, from a President, there's all sorts of jockeying, all sorts

of movement and decision-making...from the staff members around him. And sometimes he's not even aware of what's going on in terms of, this draft was killed, we're getting another draft, that sort of thing. So...so all of this made for a real bubbling pot, you know? And in the second administration, Don Regan and his staff members tried to deal with the bubbling pot by taking the pot off the heat, and you can't do that. Do you know what I mean? You can't just make speechwriting a typist center, where people type little things and then you send it out and everybody puts their additions and deletions and then somebody retypes it and that's the speech. That's not a speech. That's not even a good memo! (laughter) You know what I mean? That's not even a good commission report, although it would read somewhat like a commission report. So, it's a ... speechwriting has been a constant problem for everybody in this administration, since day 1. And ... and that has served this administration and this president pretty good, do you know what I mean, for all the trouble, it's worked. I don't know how it will work now, but I... it will be bad if speechwriting doesn't stay the focal point of all the tensions. I mean tensions are good – that's what art comes out of – struggle. You know? That's what policy comes out of – disagreement. Mush comes out of nothing. Am I being too blunt? Am I going to get in trouble?

Q: No. No. I...The people who have the opportunity to listen to this in the future are going to be fascinated.

PN: Oh will they? Do you think so?

Q. Oh, absolutely. You mentioned that your speeches had an emotional tone to them, perhaps more than some of the other people's and that you talked about how they ...you tried to get them to "soar." Were there occasions where your speeches came back to you and the comment was perhaps "this is too emotional," or this soars too far?

PN: See I didn't ... it's funny ... "emotional" isn't the right word and I can't think of the right word. The...the...I don't like to use emotional words like "heart." Or do you know what I mean like ... emotional language...I'll tell you what people mean when they say emotional and what I mean when I say emotional here ...I like to ... I don't like dry proclamations I like to talk to people, and I like to communicate to them directly just the way people talk, do you know what I mean? I'm a person, they're a person. I like to be very direct. I don't like stilted communication that puts a wall between people. And I don't like ... the kind of phony communication that doesn't take into account that our hearts and minds are involved here ...I'm sort of rambling –

Q: That's all right.

PN: The Gettysburg Address was a very emotional address without using a single emotional word, it appealed to the mind and the heart, and it said some true things. Things that are true forever. Um ...

Q: Well, let me re-phrase the ...

PN: No ... I'm rambling around here but there's a sort of point I want to make. The President's speech after the Challenger blew up ... is always called an emotional address. It wasn't an emotional address it was a personal address. It talked to school children, and it made a declaration about, this is a very sad and horrible thing but nothing ends here ... that touched people's emotions – both of those things – that he cared about the kids and that he cared about the future. It touched their emotions and they felt it. So they called it emotional. But ... but it wasn't one of these like William Jennings Bryant "You shall not crucify mankind!" Now that's emotional! You know what I mean?

Q: All right, I see ...

PN: It's sort of ...there's a sort of difference ...it has to do with affect ... I guess.

Q: All right, with that concept in mind, were any, or many, or none of your speeches ... did they come back in draft form saying "Peggy, this soars too high," or this ...

PN: No. Never. I never soared too high. (laughter)

Q: OK. They might have gotten after you because you were delving into what some people call "policy matters" but uh ...

PN: Um ...

Q: Did that happen?

PN: Oh sure, I had terrible policy fights with people, I had great fun too – I did a lot of good mischief. Um ... oh it all gets so involved, you know, it gets very complex. The ... in the famous Strasberg speech, you know, which became a very controversial speech in house, and which Bud McFarlane wound up writing, rewriting the whole middle of it ...I tried – quite legitimately, I thought – to say some serious and thoughtful people – thoughtful things to the people of Europe. That's a bad examp-... in a way that's such a big example that I don't want to use it. Um ... Maybe I should suffice it to say I got into political arguments all the time A) because of the way that I'd say things sometimes, and B) because of the content I'd put in. Uh ...

Q: When you put this content in, were you aware that some people might say "Hey, this is policy, and you shouldn't get into this, Peggy?"

PN: Yeah. But that's not the way they'd put it. They'd say... they'd just "X" out the paragraph. You know? They'd never say "that's policy and you shouldn't get into it." That's the type of thing they say to the newspapers. You know that's the type of thing they're quoted as saying but that's not really what they say in-house. In-house they say ... they say we can't talk about ... adoption ... adoption, well that's a bad ...that's connected to abortion and they always used abortion as an example. You can't talk about tax reform here, because we're not ... because we don't want to, you know... we're not getting too good support on that right now, and we want to get off that. Contras. You

can't talk about the Contras ... because its ... we're getting nowhere, no bounce out of it in the polls. Getting nowhere, the press is against us, the President is out on a limb, we may take a loss on this, we're not going to talk about the Contras anymore. You know? My answer would be if we're losing we gotta win, and if you're gonna win you have to talk about it. So let's talk about it, but let's talk about it in a new, thoughtful way. There was ... I'm going to ramble on to something else unless you stop me ...

Q: Go ahead, rant, I've got another tape here (laughter).

PN: One of the things that has disturbed me about the rhetoric that comes out of here ... about writing for the president, in the modern White House, is that in a way everybody wants a jazzy speech or a speech that strikes them as jazzy. That mostly has ... that mostly means they want "sloganeering." They want a good peppy line, they're good on "peppy." They want a good peppy line and some good sloganeering. But they never want to be really thoughtful about stuff. This is true of the "pragmatists," but it seems to me that it was often true of the "ideologues" or the "true believers." I've never believed ... I'm not interested in lines like "evil empire," um ... I use that just as an example, it's the only one that comes to mind but there've been a million – not a million – but a hundred such lines. I'm not interested in lines so much as ... if Ronald Reagan really thinks that communism is evil, you know he ought to sit down some day and talk about that ... he ought to do a major speech on it some day. He ought to do a speech for the history books. You know? Talk about "You know what, we've been living in the world with a Communist regime, the Soviet Union, since 1917 and this is how that regime has changed the world and this is how I feel about it, and this is what I think it threatens to do down the road and this is what I think we ought to do know, and this is why." Instead we wind up with this sterile sloganeering, about ... about ... "the freedom fighters are fighting for democracy, and we're going to back them up." Do you know what I mean, somehow ... we do sound bites ... they're big on sound bites here, you know the evening news comes along and needs an 8 second sound bite, and we give it to them. But there's something very anti-thought about modern rhetoric, and about this president's rhetoric, frequently – not always – you know? I wish we could just take the time to talk about some serious things. I come from a nice family where it's not full of professionals – my brother's a teamster – he's a bright guy, he'll say to me sometimes "why is a small government better than a big government?" You know he thinks, "why?" And this is not an idiot talking, this is a man in his mid-20s who, with a serious question. "Why do the communists want to do bad stuff to us? Why should they, that doesn't make sense." Somebody ought to sit down and ... I mean a president, a leader, ought to talk to the people and say ... sometimes explain the premises, you know? And we never wind up doing that. We wind up doing this ... this sterile sort of sloganeering. And I ... and in a way I'm part of the blame, because I came out of a network news shop knowing that they need 8 seconds, and wanting to give them the best 8 ... [Tape Ends]

Tape 2
Side A

Q: I don't have a watch, Peggy, so ...

PN: Well, let's wrap this up in about 15 minutes then.

Q: This is Tape 2 Side 1 of the interview with Peggy Noonan.

PN: Can I say one thing more?

Q: Sure, go ahead.

PN: Lincoln was the greatest writer this old house has ever seen, Teddy Roosevelt was a great writer too. They, as presidents, um ... Lincoln and the mystic quiz of memory – they as presidents always talked about the things, implicitly, that unite us. That we're here for. Almost the mission of being here, the point of our existence. Where we've been, where we're trying to go. They were great context givers, these presidents. And part of it I'm talking about is ...is we've lost the context in some way. You know, sort of ...we never give the context anymore. We should. People are smart. You forget when you work in here that the American people are really smart people, you get this cynical view of them I think sometimes. You get your latest poll readout and you see that they don't understand Central America – 23 percent said “where is it?” – you think they're stupid ...but they're not stupid. Their attention is distracted though, you know? Housewife lives in Topeka, you know she's really smart, she's very bright, she reads the papers, but you know she's got a son who's stuck fooling around with drugs, she's got a husband who's leaving her, she's fighting with her boss, do you know what I mean? She's got all these problems because she's a human being. She's got a half an hour to sit down sometimes ... she'll watch the President if he'll talk to her. You know?

Q: Peggy, this man has been referred to as the “Great Communicator,” that ties in with the question about the impact of television on this president. Could you address that question? Is television, has it been a help or a hindrance to him? You mentioned a... 8 second spots and how we've had to condense and shape our communications with that idea in mind. Has that been a help or a hindrance? Coming from television as you have, coming from journalism as you have ...

PN: I don't know, I don't do big think in that way. My opinion is that you know that television is this marvelous means of communication. It's this box that every American has in his home. He puts on the box, and if the president wants to talk to him he can. You know, if the president's sitting in his office here, and this guys sitting at home on the couch, and there's real communication taking place – it's one way – but what the heck. So in that sense it's good for any leader. I personally don't buy all this stuff about, that it means that all leaders have to be cosmetically acceptable, because ... look at Jimmy Carter. Unattractive voice; odd, weird persona ... so it seems to me that it's good for a president to be able to go out on the stump ... that make ...the electronic stump, it's the most extraordinary thing. And this president is very good at it because he's very expert at ... at memorizing a speech ... not memorizing entirely, but he reads ...you know when he's on national TV giving a national address it's very hard for him. You know it's 25 minutes long and you have to read from a teleprompter which is a very hard thing to do.

The most practiced network anchors only read from that teleprompter for about tens seconds before the story comes up, and Robert Pierpoint tells you the story, you know, and then it's back to Dan Rather and he goes for another 8 seconds. Poor Reagan goes 22 minutes, 25 minutes, reading straight from the teleprompter and it's extremely hard and he does it beautifully. He's wonderful at it. He never ... well that's not true ... he has beautiful eye contact ... he has a beautiful voice, and ... and he frequently, it seems to me, warms to a speech ... so he thinks it's just right, and he reads it in a way that communicates to you "this is what I think, this is what I feel, this is right, this is it," you know? And it's magic, I think. I don't think TV has been bad for him, I think it's been great. I think.

Q: All the ...

PN: Oh, actually I have one more thought ...

Q: Okay.

PN: TV is a habit which is now becoming sort of genetically ingrained in Americans, I believe, and perhaps people throughout the world. TV as a habit is getting in the way of thought in a number of ways I suppose but in one way that I'm conscience of ... my whole generation is trained to watch something and think about it for just about 7 and a half minutes before the commercial comes and they get to go to the bathroom. When the president gives a speech for 25 minutes I think people zone out just about every 6,7, 8 minutes, I really do. I'll tell you why I think so – because I do. And I wrote it. So you know what I do sometimes when I'm writing, if it's a long speech, I would sort of time, almost for myself, the deliberately sort of boring parts, and stick it in the commercial part, and then get strong again, as if the commercial's over now. I'd almost do a segue-way, do you know what I mean? I go to the theater a lot, and I see people fidget in their seats just about every 6,7,8 minutes because they think its time for a commercial. I have fights with my husband sometimes when I fidget in the fights – time to leave now, time to get a beer – that's an irrelevant point but there you are.

Q: Of all the things you wrote for the president, are there one two or three of them that stand head and shoulders above the rest? That you're most proud of?

PN: Yeah, but you know, I was blank on that ... somehow I always answer this question in a way that I think, "no, that wasn't quite it." The CPAC speech of 1985 was I think a great speech because it A) it really marched as good brisk rhetoric ought to do but, B) it laid out the agenda for the second administration in a way that I thought was most vigorous and compelling. That, the Fudan University speech in China, I thought was good. It was talking to kids, which is something I like to do ... I have a lot of younger sisters and a younger brother and I like very much to talk to young people. And I think the president does too – you know he always did that as governor of California – he was always having high school and college kids in. The JFK speech was really, it was ... concrete metaphor. It worked..... The Challenger speech was a good speech. You know it was a very simple speech, but I really felt it said the right things. And I really felt it

made people better – feel better. There were two things I wanted to do. One was comfort people who were confused – you know how frightened people get when they see things blow up, or when they see ... you've seen an auto accident, it's very frightening, and you need somebody to sort of calm you down. So I was very much ... I kind of figured the entire nation had seen an auto accident, you know? And I also ... you know it's always very important to put these things in context again, and say terrible things happen to pioneers, but the trek does not stop here. I guess that's about it.

Q: How many speeches did you write? Do have any... do you know? Can you say right off the top of your head, "I wrote X number,"

PN: No. I never counted.

Q: Okay.

PN: Uh ... 'd say about a hundred. I'd be surprised if it was much less and I don't think it could be much more.

Q: When somebody wants to track you down 10 or 15 years from now, Peggy, where are they going to find you, and how might they go about finding you? Are you going to be in New York, are you going to be on the evening news, are you going to be in Washington

PN: No. I don't want to do journalism, I mean I don't want to do electronic journalism because it is limited and it's not the best place for a writer today. I think I will ...next step for me is probably writing a book. We're working out the contract stuff now, that's why I had to leave when I left I couldn't get serious about the contract stuff until I was out of here because it gets you in all kinds of legal problems. We're starting to get serious now because I'll be out of here Friday. I think I will write a book next, and I... you know I have touched on mass media I've worked there, I've see that power center. I've worked in the White House, I've worked there and I've seen that power center. The next power center I think I want to go to is American culture and entertainment. You know? I'd like to work in Hollywood for a while. I'd like to see movies and TV – I love TV – I love its potential and I love made for TV movies and all that stuff, you know? I love the theater and theatrical stuff. So that's the next power center I'd like to visit, in a way.

Q: Are you a member of any organizations or anything that will keep track of you in the event a researcher tries to run you down and doesn't know where to start?

PN: Well I'll always have friends at CBS. At CBS News in New York and they'll always know where I am because they'll always follow my career because I've been there for years. I was there for years. I'm married to Dr. Richard Rahn who is a Vice President and the Chief Economist for the US Chamber of Commerce. And I think Richard always thinks he'll probably be there for a good long time, so that would be one way to track me down...

Q: College or University alumni association?

PN: I don't keep in such good touch with them, but they keep in ... they keep track of me a little bit (laughter) ... they wind up visiting me no matter where I am ...

Q: Which University is that?

PN: Fairleigh Dickinson University in Rutherford, New Jersey. So they always have a pretty good sense, if not of my address, of where I am working.

Q: Peggy, we have touched upon the questions I'd hoped to cover, we've gone beyond that because you'd indicated that you were quite willing to listen and talk about these things. Is there something that I haven't asked you that you haven't touched upon, that you'd like to add at this point? Is there anything that comes to mind? Oh, I do have one other ... I retract that ...

Q: Is there one event that you will take with you from this White House experience that will stand head and shoulders above all the rest? Perhaps it was a speech you wrote. Perhaps it was something you saw or you witnessed, or that you read ... some people can't answer that question and I don't want to make it sound like you've got to ... some people say "everyday I came to the White House was an exhilarating experience for me and there weren't really any one day ... experiences that stand above all the rest," and other people say "Yeah there was, it's not historical, it's not significant but I'll tell you what it was," so it ranges from one extreme to the other. And other people say ... sorry! Do it!

PN: You make me think of a fact that I think is very true and I know this from people down the generations almost down the ages who've worked in this place I know it from who comes back and visits ... Working in the White House is the high point of everybody's life ... everybody's professional life, they never get over it, no matter what they go on to, it was a solid rock in the middle of their lives that is something they constantly refer back to. It tends to happen at a vivid time in people's lives I think – when they're in their 30s and 40s and they're at the top of their game professionally, no matter what it is they do for living. But you ... this is a ... place with enormous natural force that leaves its mark on all lives, and everybody – Bill Safire, Pat Buchanan, Peggy Noonan, Ben Eliot – everybody I talk to about this has told me ... people looking back always say, this is...this was "the" time in their life. And as I say I do mean people who have gone on to quite stunning things. It is an unforgettable time in their lives. I notice being where I am in this office – this is a nice big office and it's been inhabited by many interesting middle level people over the years – and they wind up coming back. Guys from the Eisenhower administration have come back here to look around and tell me who was here, who was in this office, you know guys come back here and say "I remember when Jim St. Clair was sitting at your desk," you know? Trying to ... this was his office you know, and he was trying to handle Watergate from here. I've had Truman guys come back, I've had guys tell me ... I had a guy come back from the Truman administration who swore to me that he had a picture of FDR sitting on my balcony right off me office here staring over at the White House when FDR was either Secretary of the Navy or

Undersecretary, so it winds up being a vivid experience for everybody ... and I went to the first – sometime back – first meeting of the Judson Welliver Society which is the society of the – that Bill Safire started just this past year – it was the first meeting – of all former and current presidential speechwriters.

Q: Really!

PN: And it was marvelous and people got up and spoke about their experiences in the White House and again you could see that this was the hard rock in their existence no matter what else they went on to. Peter Benchley, who was a speechwriter for LBJ, just ... you know has gone on to be a famous novelist, screenwriter, all this stuff. What's his latest novel about? About the White House. It's always about the White House, you know? My own, most vivid White House memory ... well there's two. One was walking one morning – I shocked myself by coming to work early – it was about 7:20 and I was treating myself to breakfast at the Mess, and as I walked from the EOB to the White House Mess, this pretty spring or summer day, it was warm, the sun was very bright, and the sun was striking the West Wing – the white paint on the West Wing, in such a way that I thought "this is the whitest color I've ever seen. I'm working in the whitest house," you know? And I went to the Mess, and then for some reason I had to ... I think the president had remarks in the Rose Garden, that morning and I went by to see them, and I smelled the – the thick smell of all of the flowers there, then I took a walk in front of the White House and I thought "this is the most fragrant place," its not just the whitest place it's the most fragrant place. I was stunned in a sort of sensory way, by this place. And the second thing is ... is a meeting with the president. They brought me and Ben Eliot and Josh Gilder – I think Josh, I know Ben – in to meet with the President, six months ago. And Buchanan wanted this meeting for some reason, he wanted to talk about an upcoming speech, I believe it was the big Contra TV speech and we never quite got around to talking about it in a big way ... but I stood immediately to the president's right and I was looking at him as he chatted, and seeing the shape of his head and the wrinkles on his face and being aware of, as one is you know when you're with him, being very much aware of that big piece of beige plastic in his ear ... you know I'm being rather touched by the almost tentative way he looks you in the eye when he talks, and as you talk to him and as you ... you know there's a certain tentativeness that makes you wonder if he's hearing everything I say, and he's a very polite man and he tries to nod and encourage you, but you never quite get the sense that he hears every word. And there was a great uh ... paradoxically enough ... rather surprised once again by his size and fitness. You know his bigness and his fitness, but also surprised once again by his frailty – white frail hands, you know – and I had the sense for the first time of his aging. The fact that he's an old man. You know? He's an old man in a job that isn't an old man's job. And I just thought "the lion in winter, this is wintertime for that old lion," and he is a lion.

Q: Let's stop with that.

PN: Okay

Q: Thank you very much.

