

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview
Subject: Stephannie Oriabure
Interviewer: Stephanie Reynolds
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[BEGIN RECORDING]

Stephanie Reynolds: All right. I've got the recording started here. Thank you again for participating in the National Archives Oral History Project. We are documenting the history of the agency by preserving firsthand accounts of events. My name is Stephanie Reynolds, and I'm based out of our National Archives facility in Denver, Colorado. I'm assisting the agency historian, Jessie Kratz, with the interview. Today is Wednesday, January 31st, 2024. I'm speaking with Stephannie Oriabure. Hopefully, I said that correctly.

Stephannie Oriabure: That's close.

Reynolds: Okay. So, Stephannie—we're both Stephanie here—do you want to just get us started and tell me a little bit about your background, maybe your education and what you were doing before you started at NARA?

Oriabure: Okay. So, I will say my entire professional career, up until two months ago, was at the National Archives. I went to Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, for my undergraduate [degree]. I got a bachelor of arts [degree] in history, with a minor in political science. I was not quite sure what I wanted to do with that degree and the next steps of my career, so I started graduate school at the university. During graduate school, I thought about pursuing some form of public history. In my senior year of my undergraduate career, I volunteered at the George H. W. Bush Library that is also located in College Station, Texas. And at that point, I thought about pursuing something in museum education. And so that was one of the things on my list of "this is what you could do with a history degree" when I started graduate school. And I was still trying to find my way as I was enjoying courses and really getting to know more of what was open to someone with the kind of academic background that I have. . . Like most graduate students, I was pretty much broke and needed a job to supplement the stipends I had from the university. It just coincided that the Bush Library posted an internship opportunity, and so the stars aligned. I had what was, you know, the qualifications that they required, sat for an interview, and then started my internship in the Audiovisual Archives Department at the Bush Library in June of 2001.

Reynolds: What did they have you doing as part of the internship?

Oriabure: A lot of it, honestly, involved reference requests. It was my first real dive into providing reference services. And to me, in many ways, it's the heart of what the National Archives does. It's like, yes, we're preserving all these records. And the holdings of the Archives are vast and amazing stuff, but it doesn't matter if people aren't accessing it. And so that's the key to it, is access. And so, at the Bush Library, as an intern, I was dealing with a lot of reference requests for the photographs and the video in the library's holdings. So, the request could be from an individual person who had met President George H. W. Bush or Mrs. Barbara Bush, and they wanted a picture of that meeting. It could be a documentary, a company who wanted footage of President Bush meeting with Helmut Kohl as we were talking about the end of the Cold War. It was just a range of reference requests and just a really great opportunity to learn how to provide awesome customer service, which is key to it—listening and understanding what the requester needs—and also, I would say just opening my eyes to the possibilities of work that you can do with a history/information management background.

Reynolds: Mhm. You had volunteered at the library before the internship?

Oriabure: Yes. Volunteering is just part of my DNA. My parents very much bred that into us kids. It just happened that my senior year, I had a schedule that I had all Mondays and Fridays completely free. And so, I found out about an opportunity to work with the Education Department at the library, where the education docents would learn about the permanent exhibit in the library, as well as many of the temporary exhibits, and then they would take school groups through that. The school groups would be as young as first or second grade up through high school classes. And so, 1: learning the exhibits, learning the administration and the history behind the era of the Bush Presidency and before, and then [2] being able to communicate that in a meaningful way that was age appropriate for school groups. And so, it was a great marrying of my passions of history and education. And yeah, it was a fun experience.

The Education Coordinator at the time, little did we know we would become best friends and, you know, be such an integral part of each other's lives. But at that point, she was just like, "Okay, college kid, you really want to volunteer? Are you committed?" And I'm like, "Yes, I will study what I need to study. I will show up weekly and do these tours."

And so, it was such an amazing experience . . . the work itself, [and] the people throughout my career. It really is the people of NARA. And getting to work with the other education docents was such a treat because many of them were retirees. So, they had, you know, gone and done

all their different professional pursuits. And then this was just what they were doing for fun because they didn't have to show up to a job every day. And just getting to learn from them and hear their experiences was just really a privilege.

Reynolds: Mhm. Well, it sounds like you worked with some really great people there. And wow! I mean, this is all even before you started as a full-time employee! You've already got this great background in the Bush Presidency and [in] events that were going on at that time. That's just wonderful!

How did you get the job when you became a full-time employee at the Bush Presidential Library? Was it a job that was posted, and you applied for?

Oriabure: It was a job that was posted. And it was honestly fate, because most people know the jobs at the Presidential Libraries are hard to come by because people get them, they love the work, they're passionate about it, and they stay there for their careers. And there's just a limited number, so you just kind of have to wait. But I graduated in December 2001, and it just happened that two archivists at the library were leaving to accept positions at Archives I and Archives II. And so, they had a position open up, and they posted it in January. I quickly applied for that position and started as a full-time employee in March.

And the interesting thing about that is that I was one of those idealist people, you know, "I need to go to Washington, DC and live my best life and change the world at the seat of the Capital of the United States." And I just wasn't getting jobs because I had been applying all of that last semester. And Warren Finch, who was the Deputy Director of the Bush Library at the time, sat down with me. He's like, "Stephannie, if you want to do the federal government, just manage your expectations and look for opportunities in places you weren't expecting them. So, you really want to go to DC—I'm not saying that you won't get there, but if an opportunity were to open up in Texas or somewhere else, pursue it, get in the system, learn all that you can, and then you'll be ready for that opportunity in DC."

And, I mean, he was so right. And so, I was not necessarily planning on staying in College Station, but when this opportunity opened, I applied. I got it. I was like, "This is great. It's a wonderful place to learn a lot of things," because one great thing about the libraries is that an archivist working there does a little of everything. So, you're not focused on just one part of the records lifecycle. You learn about accessioning, and you learn about access review and description and arrangement. You also get to assist the Education Department with teacher workshops. And you work with the Exhibit and Museum Staff on exhibits. So, it was a great

opportunity to learn a lot, and so that's how I took it. So, in March 2002, I dived in and became a full-time archivist.

Reynolds: Yeah. I think sometimes, you know, it really helps to get your foot in the door and take that job—whatever is open—and then you can move when it's open to you. Right?

So, what did you think of the culture of the library when you first started there?

Oriabure: Well, seeing that it was my first professional job, I had nothing really to balance it out, you know, compare it to. But I will say that the team there was incredibly welcoming. I was one of the first in the second generation of staff, because when the library first opened, it quickly became fully staffed and [the staff] stayed. So, when I joined, I was the first of that second generation. They'd had, at that point, within like a year's time, four archivists leave for promotion opportunities in the DC area.

But it was just interesting to enter a place that had just a defined culture, like, they had their thing. On the Thanksgiving holiday, they would have a harvest table, which was their kind of potluck. And there was a culture of sharing. In many ways, it was a family, because a lot of those employees came to Texas from other places. And so, they really became a family, because they were all they knew in this new place. Obviously, they met other people, developed other relationships, but at its core, that's who they first interacted with in this job. And that really came through. It's just interesting thinking about some of my former colleagues and seeing them get married and have kids. And you kind of get integrated into that. And so, it was just a good place to learn how to be a professional and to be balanced. Other than that, I was just, like, if you wanted to learn how to do it, you could dive in and do it. There was no overly protective approach to "I do this, and you can't do it. I'm the only one who can do it." It was very much, "Oh, you're interested in seeing how I do this thing? Come on in. I'll show you." So, in that way, [it was] very collaborative.

Reynolds: That's great. And that way you get a lot of experience in a lot of different things. And I know you said, as an archivist, that's kind of the perk, that you get to experience all these different aspects of the job and working with records. But did you have a certain responsibility that was, you know, your main thing that you were focusing on when you were there, or did you do a lot of different things like you were talking about?

Oriabure: The main thing that I focused on as an archivist there was processing Freedom of Information Act requests, FOIA requests, for the Presidential and Vice Presidential records in our holdings. And so that is a line-by-line review to make a determination—Is this record, either

in whole or in part, something I can release, or is it exempt from release for very specific reasons—and having to document that review and then create finding aids for the records that I reviewed in response to a FOIA request. And so, for, basically, three-and-a-half of my four years there at the library, as an archivist, that was what I was focused on.

In addition to that, I got to do a rotation in our vault or the SCIF, the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, at the library that holds all the national security classified records. And so, in that work, I was still working with Presidential and Vice Presidential records, but [I was] very much focused on the process of referring them to the agencies that had information in the records to see if they could be declassified and responding to declassification requests from the public. And so that was one of those things that, "Okay, we have an opportunity for someone. Someone is stepping away from working on classified records, and here's an opportunity for you to do a rotation." And that rotation really, in many ways, changed the course of my career, because it gave me knowledge and skills that propelled me into my next job, actually.

Reynolds: Wow! You just jump right in, don't you? [LAUGHS]

Oriabure: Well, I mean, that's partly my personality. And part of it was, and this is so—I don't even know how to describe it, but—I was so excited to have a job because coming out of grad school, there were so many of my colleagues who were struggling to find work and to find work that would really sustain them in a life at a level that they wanted. And for me, I was like, "I got this job, and I can get the name brand . . . I can get Kraft Mac and Cheese! I don't have to do the store brand." It was little things like that. I was like, "This is fantastic! This job is giving me so much. I have to give my all to it." So . . . it was just very exciting to be able to pay for life doing something that you really enjoy and love.

Reynolds: Yeah, yeah. That's great. What kind of records were you working with? I mean, was it, like, correspondence and meeting logs, reports . . . ? What kind of records were you working with?

Oriabure: So, I was working with records that were created by White House staff during the Reagan and Bush 41 administrations, because George W. Bush also placed his Vice Presidential records from the Reagan administration at his library. So, from his Office of the Vice President to his actual Presidential administration, the staff that worked with the White House on his policies, on his issues, just staffed the White House—it is all their work product.

The Presidential Records Act of 1978 basically designated that all the records created by the President, Vice President, and their staffs are permanent government records that have to be

transferred to the National Archives at the end of the administration. And so those are the records we had. It was fun stuff like menus from the Calligraphy Office, to memos that were fleshing out complex issues in the White House Counsel's Office, to the [Office of Presidential] Advance and [the Presidential] Scheduling Office—the people who put together trips of the President and Vice President and handled who he saw when—the Presidential Daily Diary, which is a minute-by-minute accounting of the President's day . . . all of the photographs that the White House photographer took were in the collection. So, it's a wide range of records. And so, some of them are really fun. Some of them are a little dry. But it was true documentation of that administration. And when I was working with classified records, most of those records were National Security Council Staff Records.

Reynolds: Okay. So, when you said that you were in charge of responding to these FOIA requests, what does that involve exactly? Are you able to do searches in a system, or how do you do that process?

Oriabure: So, the staff that start up a Presidential Library has a heavy, important task, and that is really gaining intellectual control of the collection. And so that, for the textual records, is opening every box and doing an inventory of every folder, capturing any key information to identify what the content of those records are because, with the Freedom of Information Act request, a member of the public would say, "I want all of the records related to the Gulf War." And so, we would then do a search of our finding aid, our database, of that folder, title, inventory of the textual records, and then we would identify which records we thought would be responsive to that request.

Then the next step—because there would be, at one point, so many requests, it would just go into a queue—when the request came up in the queue, we would then pull all the potentially responsive records, review every word, do any redactions that we had to do, then prepare a finding aid for that. Then we also had to prepare for the notification to the former President and the incumbent President that the National Archives is proposing to open Presidential Records. This is part of the Presidential Records Act. And so [we would] prepare that package for basically the lawyers. And when they would review, they had the option of seeing any of the records we're proposing to review [release] in case they want to assert a claim of executive privilege.

And with the Bush Library, for some of our records, like the Quayle Vice Presidential Records Collection, that representative for former Vice President Quayle liked to talk to the archivist who reviewed the records. And so, one of the first sets of records I had to review for a FOIA request, the next step on the checklist was, "Okay, you get to talk to Vice President Quayle's

representative." And I was just like, "What? Me? I'm going to talk to this person? Are you sure? I don't know if that's a good idea." But he was a lovely man. And he was just like, "So tell me about your review process. Do you have any concerns that you would like to highlight for me?" and all of that. It was fine! I had no idea that that was going to be the start of talking to lots of representatives of former Presidents and Vice Presidents [LAUGHS]. But yeah.

So, the basic process is you search using the finding aids that the library staff created; you review those records; you prepare a finding aid; you prepare the notification materials; and then, once it's all cleared through that process, we alert the requester that their records are available. Then they come into the research room to look at them, or—this is old school—we would make a photocopy and send it to them, because this is pre-, you know, the scanning and digitization as a normal course of action. So . . .

Reynolds: Now, this would have been, let's see here . . . When was he President? Early 1990s?

Oriabure: He was President from 1989 to 1993. January 1989 to January 1993.

Reynolds: Okay. So, were his records still largely analog, or did he have a lot of electronic records?

Oriabure: His records were largely analog. So, as I said, we also had his Vice Presidential records. So, by far, it was a textual collection. And then the photographs—which were negatives—were not digital photographs, and basically Betacam for the videos, some VHS, that level. There were some electronic records, but we did not have regular access to them. I actually worked on the team that, in some ways, was the precursor to the electronic records system that we currently use for the born-digital Presidential and Vice Presidential records. We had a copy set of the unclassified emails, and we were working with a professor from Georgia Tech [William Underwood of Georgia Institute of Technology] to begin to imagine and pilot how we would access those records, review those records, and then make them available to the public.

I am not a technologist by any stretch of the imagination, so it was always funny that I found my way into working on born-digital records. It was a wonderful opportunity to really capture that dialogue and translation between archivists and what we know to do with information and records, and technologists, who know what to do with files and just the science behind the management of born-digital records. We didn't always speak the same language. We would say the same word, but it would mean very different things. And so that was a chance to sit down and have those translation conversations where we say, "When I say this, this is what I mean in

real terms." I'm like, "Oh, that's not what it means for us. It means this." So, our documentation should be clear as to what we're proposing, but that's a long-winded thing to say there were some electronic records, but they were not regularly requested or reviewed.

Reynolds: Okay. And then you were talking about having to do declassification reviews. So, you're not declassifying anything yourself? You're trying to see if something could be, or you're working with the agency, or how does that process work?

Oriabure: We're actually doing both. So, some agencies have delegated some declassification authority to the National Archives. So, there were very routine memos from the State Department, from the National Security Council, from the White House, that NARA archivists have the authority to declassify. We have guidelines on that. You have to be well-versed in them, because you don't want to declassify something you shouldn't. There were things that you would declassify without sending to an agency. And that is always a very scary thing when you stamp a document, and then you initial it with your initials to say, "I'm saying this is no longer classified."

Reynolds: It's on you. Wow.

Oriabure: That is a weighty thing that I never forgot the importance and significance of. That is a small portion that we can just declassify based on guidance given to us from agencies. The majority of it, we actually have to identify which agencies have an equity in the document, whether there's information that they provided in the document. Then we have to create a package that we then send to that agency for them to review and say based on their guidelines, yes, this is no longer a problem for release or part of this can be released, but some of this is still sensitive, and they would send us redaction instructions. With White House documents, because it is the top of the executive branch, it is getting information from everywhere. So many of the documents had multiple equities. So that is sitting down and taking a document, reading it, identifying all the equities, then preparing the packages to send to all those agencies. So, you could be sending a memo to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], to the Department of Defense and the State Department and NSC [National Security Council]—five different entities. You would be sending that, and then you would just wait for those agencies to get you the responses back. Then you would have to take the actions, taking all those agencies' recommendations into account.

And so, there is a lot of tracking in that to know who needs to see it, when you sent it, when it gets back, and then just that responsibility of one agency redacted paragraph one. Another agency redacted paragraph two. So, with the copy that I'm preparing to go into our research

room, I have to make sure both of those paragraphs are redacted. And so, it's a lot of teamwork, because no one is doing that alone, because we always had to double-check. It was fun. I learned a lot about what agencies do in that process, just from the training and then the real world—"Oh, so this is what this agency does, and how it gets communicated to the President's staff."

Reynolds: Yeah. You're kind of getting that back view that most people don't know about, right? So, this must take a long time, it sounds like, getting all the input. So, you're not meeting the 20-day limit or whatever . . .

Oriabure: No. No.

Reynolds: . . . that you have to have it done.

Oriabure: So, there is an executive order that covers declassification. The current Executive Order is 13526. If someone requests a Mandatory Declassification Review of a classified record, an MDR, the law says an agency has a year to complete that review. That year includes sending it to all the agencies, getting it back, taking the actions, [and] then for our Presidential and Vice Presidential records, doing the notification before we can release it. So, NARA does not often meet the year mark, but the public, for the most part, understands the challenges of the process.

Reynolds: Okay, yeah. Wow. Very complex process. While you were working with some of these collections, were you also working inside the National Archives Catalog?

Oriabure: Yes. I was on the team that first started doing catalog entries for, at that point in time, it was ARC. The Archival Research Catalog, I think, is what ARC stood for. And so, it was interesting because, in some ways, the way the predecessor to the catalog was set up was very much based on a view of the records and how they're organized—and Presidential records don't always fall exactly neatly into that structure. So, we had a lot of fun, internally in the library, trying to figure out how to describe our records to fit the requirements of the catalog. And then we also, you know, communicated with other Presidential Libraries, because we knew [that the] challenges we were facing were probably the same challenges that they were facing. So, it was a good experience of working across libraries and also interacting with the larger NARA organization.

I still remember the trip I took, because you used to have to go to Archives II to get the training to then be able to enter [records descriptions] into the catalog . . . I think it was a three-day

training with a notebook that was this thick [HOLDS UP HANDS TO SHOW THICKNESS] to go through the requirements and everything. So, I'm quite familiar with the catalog and its predecessors.

Reynolds: Okay, it sounds like maybe more than you wanted to be. [LAUGHS]

Oriabure: [LAUGHS] Well, I mean, it goes back to my big thing of "We need to connect with the public and make the stuff available where they can access it." So, I knew that that was part of it. And so, diving into it and trying to make it user-friendly and truly descriptive of what the records are, was definitely high on my list of priorities.

Reynolds: Sure. Were there any—I don't know—interesting records or artifacts or anything that you had to work with while you were at the Bush Library that kind of sticks out in your mind?

Oriabure: This is a question that archivists often get: What is your favorite record? What is the thing? And it's really hard to nail down. And my standard answer is just the fact that [the National Archives] exists. When I was explaining to my parents about my job—my dad was born and raised in Nigeria—and the concept of the government being intentional about documenting its work to make it accountable to the people was completely foreign to him. And so, he was just like, "Wait a minute. They have records that even show when they don't do things right, and they're going to make them available to. . .?" I'm like, "Yes. Yes, Daddy. That is exactly what I do." And it just was such a foreign concept. And so, for me, it's not an individual record; it is just the fact that the National Archives exists and that it is enshrined in law, the work that we do to truly hold our government accountable and, not just accountable, but to really give insight into the government. So, I just like all of the records. The existence of these records is very important to me.

But, I think, in terms of the Bush Library in particular, I would say the artifact holdings [are my favorite], because everyone's very focused on the textual records and the born-digital records. But the artifact holdings are fascinating. What foreign heads of state give the President to demonstrate the state of the relationship between the two countries, to show the best of that country, to show, you know . . . demonstrates the personality of that leader or their perception of our country. I think the artifact collection is amazing. There are some beautiful, incredibly valuable things. Then there are the things that regular everyday people give to the President, some that are lovely and show a lot of skill, some of them not so much. We had always joked that we should do an exhibit on the good, the bad, and the ugly, letting the people decide which [LAUGHS] category the artifact falls into. Because it's just the sheer range of things in the

artifact collections at the libraries [that] is just insane. So, I would say that is something that really stands out.

And in terms of traditional archives for the Bush Library, this I can say is a letter that President Bush wrote to his kids on the eve of the Gulf War. It was the last day in 1990. Troops are already in the Middle East, but they have not launched the actual war yet—Desert Storm. And President Bush loved to type his letters himself . . . and he was not a good typist. Let's just say lots of errors. But this two-page letter he typed up—and you can see his handwritten corrections—it just, to me, ticks all the things, like: shows the humanity of the person who occupies that office, as well as, in some ways, the entire White House staff . . . that in news articles, as we talk about them, we just say, "Oh, the White House," "the President," and we forget that they are people who really feel things. And I get emotional about it, because he obviously was feeling the weight of having to make a decision on war, and it's just his humanity in the writing of that, his appreciation of humanity, and just the fact that we all have a story. We all create records, and it's really important to show that. It's not just the memos. It's not just the formal proclamations that . . . I don't know. I would say at the Bush Library, that is one of my favorite records. [WIPES TEARS] Sorry. I get emotional, because I remember the eve of the Gulf War, and though I was relatively young, it was still very impactful. And to think that the President also felt that way really resonated with me.

Reynolds: Right. I remember that as well. You have a really unique perspective, because you're working with those records and you're actually seeing his humanity. That's really touching. I had no idea that that letter existed. So, you know, these are the things that we try to provide access to and let people know that [they] exist.

Oriabure: Exactly. Exactly.

Reynolds: Yeah. So how long were you actually at the Bush Library?

Oriabure: As a full-time archivist, it was four years and like a week or two weeks before I transferred to the Nixon Presidential Materials Staff.

Reynolds: Okay. And then how did that happen that you were able to transfer? This is in Washington, DC, right?

Oriabure: Yes. Yes. It is relationships. Warren Finch, at that time—I'm trying to think if he was still either the Deputy Director at the Library or he was the Director—he was talking to a colleague in the DC area, Nancy Kegan Smith, who was head of the Presidential Materials Staff.

That staff, one of its responsibilities was declassification policy for the Presidential Libraries. And she knew that the Nixon staff was going to be challenged to meet the automatic declassification deadlines that were established in, at that time, Executive Order 12958, as amended. And so, she's telling him about this . . . "We really need people." And Warren said, "Well, I have an archivist who is great, who now has experience in declassification and has always wanted to move to the DC area. So, I would encourage you to approach her." And she did. And it kind of hit me because, as much as I wanted to move to the DC area, I had a wonderful life in College Station. I had great friends. I had my community. But it just was a deal I couldn't turn down. It just took me a second to get there. And so, I transferred to the Nixon Staff specifically to help with declassification. And so that's how it happened. And I mean, now looking back and knowing more about HR [Human Resources] and personnel, I still don't quite understand how they made this happen. But they made it happen.

And so, I transferred here and started working at Archives II in College Park and moving into an even more established team. So that was fun! And yeah, it was a shock because it was a different culture than what I came from. And it was also an office that was on the precipice of major change because discussions had already started about bringing the Nixon Library (that had been privately run) into the National Archives system. And so that was going on when I joined the staff. And so, you had long-time employees who had dealt with some of the incredibly challenging early days of the Nixon Materials Staff and challenges about the work they were doing and the release of records, having to think about the joining of the very different Nixon Library and this team. So, it was interesting. It was interesting. And I was the young kid on the block because I think they all thought I was, like, 21. [LAUGHS] One of them finally was just like, "Stephannie, I have to ask. How old are you?" And I'm like, "I'm old enough to be here. It's going to be okay." [LAUGHS] But they were a fun staff. And, yeah, I wasn't there very long but, in that time, I did learn a lot. I learned a lot.

Reynolds: Mhm. So, is that why—because it was being run by another entity—that this position was located in DC and not at the library in California?

Oriabure: Yes, because the library in California, at the time, was not the National Archives. When we think about Nixon Presidential Materials, that was just that staff in College Park . . . Part of the transition was that team. . . NARA senior management was negotiating . . . how to adequately address the concerns and the needs of the staff [when] bringing in the Nixon Library. Was the expectation that all that staff would have to move to California? Or if they didn't move, what was going to happen? And how long would it take to physically move all the things over to the Nixon Library, because what was at the Nixon Library were non-Presidential materials—his personal materials, post-Presidential materials, that kind of thing versus what

was in College Park, which were his White House files, the White House tapes, the Presidential gifts. All of that from the Presidency was still in NARA's custody at Archives II.

Reynolds: Okay. That makes sense then. You said that they wanted to bring you in because of your background in doing FOIA and declassification reviews. Is that mainly what you were doing when you were working with these papers?

Oriabure: I was almost exclusively doing declassification with regular reference duty, because the reference duty rotated in terms of on-site researchers coming to look at the Nixon materials and as emails and phone calls [were received] asking for specific records or information. But my main responsibility was preparing the textual records for automatic declassification review and then also helping respond to mandatory declassification review requests by the public for those records. So that was mainly what I did. But I had a little bit [of] a learning curve, because I knew/breathed all things Bush administration. So, for me, it was always between January 20th, 1989, and January 20th, 1993. And so, I had to really orient myself to the Nixon administration and the Nixon era, because you have to know the context in which to make smart decisions on things like declassification. Each administration, each era, has in some ways its own language. And so, you need to be able to know what random shorthand acronyms, things that they use, mean. So, I did have to study up a lot on Nixon when I first joined the staff.

Reynolds: Wow. Okay. Yeah, that makes sense having to know who the staff are that they're talking about and the events that are happening at the time and just having that background so you can make those informed decisions.

Oriabure: Exactly. So, I mean, I knew about the Nixon era. Obviously, I'm a history person, but I just needed more of a deep dive.

Reynolds: Mhm. Did you notice a difference between the records and materials of the Bush Presidency and [that of] the Nixon Presidency? Was there a difference?

Oriabure: Absolutely. You still see candid, interesting things in the Bush records. But the Bush records are after the Presidential Records Act, when everyone in the White House knew that everything that they wrote down, every memo they typed up, would be going to the National Archives and would eventually be disclosed to the public—versus Nixon, which at that point, Presidential materials were considered the personal property of the President. They could do whatever they wanted with it. If they wanted to destroy it, if they wanted to deposit it in their Presidential Library, if they wanted to give it . . . they could do whatever. And there was not that underlying assumption that everyone is going to see everything. And so, there's just a lot

more off-the-cuff things that you're just like, "Oh my God," [LAUGHS] when you read it or hear it. I mean, like, I think that's one of the fascinations with the Nixon White House tapes is that you're getting not just Nixon, but his staff, in a very raw form. And . . . think about when you're with your colleagues, what you will say talking to one another in passing, never imagining that it's going to be captured and shared with people. Yes. [LAUGHS] There are differences between those Nixon Records and later Presidential collections.

Reynolds: Hmm. Interesting. Was there a difference in the process . . . going through that declassification review? Was there a difference between what you were doing with the Bush Presidency, those records, and [what you were doing] for the Nixon [Presidency]? Or is the process the same?

Oriabure: The process is the same. The sensitivities are a little different, because when I was working with the Bush stuff . . . that material was less than 20 years old in some cases, versus the Nixon stuff that was several decades old. So, sensitivity erodes as time passes. And so, in some ways, what would have been very sensitive then was not as sensitive when I was reading it and making declassification decisions on it. But the process itself was the same, basically.

Reynolds: Okay. Interesting. So, I believe it was in September of 2006 that you joined the Presidential Materials Staff, which was later known as the Presidential Material Division and then later reorganized?

Oriabure: Yes.

Reynolds: [LAUGHS] So there was, like, a long string of—it was this, then it became this, and now it's this. [LAUGHS] Good old-fashioned federal reorganizations, right?

Oriabure: Yes, yes. So, those name changes reflect an agency-wide reorganization called the Transformation in . . . 2011 maybe—and then an internal [reorganization] to the Legislative Archives, Presidential Libraries, and Museum Programs Office in 2020. So, there have been some reorgs along the way. But Nancy Kegan Smith, who was the one who had contacted the Director at the Bush Library about knowing someone to assist with declass at Nixon, there was just additional support that was provided to the Nixon Project for that declass from her office, and that individual decided that she really wanted to stay with the Nixon Materials and was willing to move to California. I was not. And so, we basically did a swap. So, I went and took her place at the Presidential Materials Staff, and she took my place permanently at the Nixon Presidential Materials Staff.

It was a little bit shocking. I am a creature of habit, thus my 20-something years at NARA. I was not expecting to leave a position after six months, but it made sense for everyone, if you have someone who you know is going to stay with these records, is interested in these records, versus someone who is interested in these records but is not planning to go to California . . . And so, I joined the Presidential Materials Staff, and that staff was yet a different iteration of NARA for me. So [at the] Bush Library, you very much have that field office and then just the uniqueness of a Presidential Library. Then with Nixon, you have a Presidential Library that is at [NARA] headquarters.

Reynolds: Yes.

Oriabure: So that is its own thing. And then now you are [at] headquarters that is helping lead in policy but is now also becoming a custodial unit. So, the Presidential Materials Staff had what we called "Courtesy Storage Teams." They supported White House Records Management and the White House Gift Office. The White House would run out of room on the complex, and so they had an agreement with the National Archives that the National Archives would store records and gifts during the administration. We would be a "blind storer," so we're not opening the boxes. We're not doing anything with these. We are truly just blind, courtesy storers of these records, and we would provide recall service. So, they think they're not going to need this box of records, so they're going to retire it to the National Archives. "Oh, something has come up. We need that box." They contact the Presidential Materials Staff, and we get it over to them. So that was one aspect of the office.

And then the other aspect was policy. That was providing review guidance on FOIA, declassification. . . This part of the office also was the main liaison between the representatives of the former Presidents, Vice Presidents, and the White House Counsel for the current President, and NARA, in dealing with the notifications for the intent to release Presidential records. So, I think I mentioned that we had to notify all of these people. Some of the Presidential Materials Staff Team, that was their job to work with those—normally attorneys—to get the notifications for the public request as well as special access requests, like congressional requests, to records that are not publicly available. So, they did that, and I ostensibly was supposed to be assisting that part of the team.

But the third part that was slowly growing and was not necessarily intended for that team was the collections of Presidential and Vice Presidential records and materials that the office had become custodian of. So, well, before my time there, they ended up getting the classified holdings of the Hoover, FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt], and Truman Library holdings—so just the classified. It's not a huge volume, but it is a volume that still received public requests, and so

they had to handle the declassification request for that. And then, unexpectedly, Vice Presidents decided not to send their Vice Presidential collections to the respective Presidential Library. So, Vice President Gore decided not to send his records to the Clinton Library. They were retained in DC, and Presidential Materials Staff now became the custodian. Vice President Cheney did the same thing. Vice President Biden did the same thing, and Vice President Pence. So, this office now held a significant volume of records.

And so, what really became my focus being on that staff was handling the archival processing of those, all of the responsibilities: the description of the collections in the National Archives Catalog, handling preservation, handling public requests for those records, handling congressional and other special-access requests for those records. That became a pretty big job to do, so that office grew some. And so that's what I focused on, that archival custodian responsibility. And then, just because of my experience and the projects I've worked on, I also contributed to the policy side because I had a very practical experience in that, and I can say, "This policy makes sense, because this is how it can be implemented," or "Here are the challenges. We need to rethink how to approach that."

Reynolds: Okay. Wow. I had no idea. So, you were actually creating the policies for processing and for the whole process, it sounds like.

Oriabure: Yes. So, I mean, it was very basic because that was a policy office. So, they didn't have the infrastructure already baked in to do just straight archival processing. So, it was basic things, like putting together a processing manual, having the different checklists and the way you're going to do double-check on declassification actions, working with the National Archives Catalog to make sure that the office shows up as an entity, and that we have accounts so that we can actually create descriptions. And so, a lot of that . . . I'm really proud of that, honestly, of taking the lead on that, because that was a very organic growth in scope of the office that I had to kind of jump in and create some order to it. But I'm very proud of it.

I led that, but I don't want to say I was the only one working on that. I had amazing colleagues: John Laster, who is actually the person whose position I took at the Bush Library when he moved to Washington to join this office—we always joke that I kind of followed him around in my career; Kate Dillon McClure, who was also a Bush Library alum who was working in the office; Beth Fidler, who had so much experience in declassification. They became kind of like peers/mentors in terms of . . . they were very open to me and saw me as a peer, but with their experience and everything, I always considered them mentors. I would like to note that I also worked with Tom Lutte, Merrily Harris, Abigail Myrick, Steven Booth, Whitney Ross, Kirstin Holm, and Catherine Brandsen during these years. They were absolutely wonderful.

So, it was a fun work environment. It was a stressful work environment at times, because this office was also responsible for Presidential transitions, but, you know, stress can bring out really fun, goofy parts of people. We really were a family and did and saw a lot of craziness and the things that would have NARA on the front page of a newspaper [that] the office handled. And so, it was inspiring, and [it] also really informed how I presented myself, seeing my colleagues, seeing my boss, navigating all of that.

Reynolds: Wow. That sounds like it was very complex, and that manual and the guidance that you provided must have been huge to the people that were working there in having a process in place. That's wonderful.

I do want to talk about the Presidential transitions, which you just mentioned. But, before that, I just want to ask—we did mention that there was that reorganization, and that it became, I think, the Archival Operations Division.

Oriabure: Mhm.

Reynolds: Now, did that reorganization impact how you were doing your job, or did you notice any changes from that reorganization?

Oriabure: There were some significant changes from that reorganization, because the Presidential Materials Division basically became two separate offices. And so, the staff that was very heavily integrated, the expertise that was pooled, was kind of segmented. And so, we had to navigate that—just the administrative work of establishing two new offices—and navigate how those interact and the divvying up of responsibilities. So, I would say there was a significant change, especially for me, because I did a detail for a year as a supervisor for the Archival Operations Division—one half of the split of the office—and then later became the Director.

And so, one thing I had not done before was formal supervision. I had been a team lead for almost a decade, but I had not done formal supervision, and I had not been in a position at the level of directors where [we were] meeting weekly or bi-weekly with our executive. And so that was very much a developmental leap for me. I think I grew into it [LAUGHS]. My colleagues would be able to tell you better. But it was really a growth opportunity and fun to establish a culture for an office, because culture is made up of the people. So how we worked together, how we did things, couldn't be exactly the same as we did before, because we didn't have all the same players, and our responsibilities and scope of work were slightly different.

And so, I was very intentional about wanting to establish a culture that reflected the best of all my experiences at NARA, of being collaborative, of being fun in spite of the hard things, and really nurturing people to be able to develop the skills they wanted. It's hard because I loved-loved my team, and I wanted us all to stay together. But more importantly, I wanted them to gain everything that they could so that they could go wherever they wanted to go. So, it was hard. It was hard, but it was a lot of fun. I miss that team so much!

Reynolds: Were you the first Director, then, of this division?

Oriabure: Yes, yes. . . The reorganization went into place in February 2020. And then less than a month later, we were hit with the pandemic. And so, we had that challenge of trying to figure out our new world, develop our relationships and our office in isolation, in many ways, in that we were doing it from our homes and not together in the office. So that was just another layer. But I learned that there are ways to engage people and to stay connected, even if you're not physically in the same place. I think everyone has learned that from the experience of the pandemic. But, in terms of the work itself, the new office had to handle all the custodial responsibilities for the collections, as well as handling archival policy for the libraries and the Center for Legislative Archives.

Reynolds: Okay. Along with the COVID pandemic, there were several big events that were happening while you were at NARA. So, I wanted to talk about a few of those here. So, both John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh were nominated to the Supreme Court while you were in that office. And I was just wondering if you could describe, you know, as part of the National Archives, how you were involved in these events.

Oriabure: Oh, okay. So, John Roberts, I was actually still at the Bush Library, but it was towards the end of my time. And it just happened that when the nomination came out and the request for Presidential Records related to John Roberts came in, I was the acting supervisory archivist at the Bush Library [for one week]. So, [LAUGHS] it was supposed to be just kind of a placeholder. My boss was going on leave. He deserved to have some leave. And he's like, "I just need to have someone for staff to like, say, 'I'm going to be out sick or whatever.'" Like no one thought anything big was going to happen. And then that happened!

Reynolds: Of course. [LAUGHS]

Oriabure: And that was, honestly, my first interaction with Nancy Smith and Beth Fidler, who I would later work with, [when I] pulled what was a small volume of records at the Bush Library

together to prepare—1: [to] highlight to the public what had already been released, but also [2:] to provide all of the records unredacted to the Senate Judiciary Committee. So, it was a stressful couple of days, but we got it done. And you're like, "Whew!" [HOLDS HAND TO FOREHEAD].

Meanwhile, my colleagues at the Reagan Library were inundated because John Roberts was in the White House Counsel's Office, and so it's not a couple hundred pages. We're talking about thousands and thousands and thousands of pages that they're having to review and make available. . . . At a certain point, they were like, "We need all hands on deck." And so, they did a call out to the libraries who had Presidential Records Act-FOIA experience, who could help assist with this process. And so, I was like, "I'm available. I don't have much going on right now. My boss is back, so I'm no longer acting supervisor. I can do it." So, I flew to the Reagan Library. At LAX [Los Angeles International Airport], I met the then-Director of the Nixon Presidential Materials Staff—like all these connections [LAUGHS] I never knew were going to pan out later. I met the Director at the airport. We drove to the library, and then I was at the library for a week, just working alongside the library staff. They had people at—was it Riverside or San Bruno?—making photocopies. It was a truly all-NARA effort of pulling whatever resources they could to make this happen, because it was very much in the public spotlight. And so, I got to meet colleagues in person while I was at the Reagan Library. The supervisory archivist at the time, Mike Duggan, who I later worked with in the Archival Operations Division, was just phenomenal. He was a profile of leadership. He was the first one there, the last one to leave. And when I say first and last, like, we're talking 14-hour days, just barely going home to eat, shower, and come back. And so, that was my John Roberts experience. I played a small part. There were many people who played much larger parts in that. But it was a great experience to see kind of a NARA all-hands-on-deck effort.

And it is just a testament to the changes in technology and the records that we were dealing with, what the experience was with Brett Kavanaugh, because it is in some ways an analogous situation in that Brett Kavanaugh was a member of the White House Counsel Staff in the George W. Bush administration, and so there were thousands of pages of records that had to be reviewed. The big difference is that there were thousands and thousands of emails that had to be reviewed as well. And I forget now what the page estimate we came up with. It was more than a million pages, hands down, of review that had to be done.

And so, with that work, I was definitely more involved. I was from the headquarters, Archives I, perspective, working with John Laster—who was head of the Presidential Materials Division at that point—to work with President Bush's attorneys and representatives, the White House, the Department of Justice, and then our own internal General Counsel's Office and stakeholders, on

how to approach this, how to manage this project. And once again, it was kind of an all-hands-on-deck where we pulled people from different libraries. The big difference is that, because the focus [was] on the largest volume of records—and the focus was really on the electronic records, the email—we could have people work on it without flying. So, we had archivists at the Reagan Library, the Clinton Library, [and] the Obama Library at that point. No, not the Obama Library. Yes, the Obama Library, all working on this project. And so, at that point, we had the Executive Office of the President instance of the Electronic Records Archive (the EOP ERA) stood up. And so, all you needed was to be at a NARA workstation, and you could access it. So, and I'm sorry, it was not the Obama Library. It was Bush 41, George H. W. Bush Library. All they had to do was sit at their desk, at their library, and they could log in and access George W. Bush Presidential email. And so, we coordinated having people from libraries across the country working on this project without having to fly any of them to Dallas. I did fly to Dallas, though, to be onsite [LAUGHS] with that incredible archival team. And so, I was in Dallas for a month working onsite with that staff, coordinating multiple meetings a day with my boss, John Laster, and Gary M. Stern, General Counsel for NARA and others that were involved.

Reynolds: So, are you having to review email manually, just one after another?

Oriabure: Yes. Everyone was [LAUGHS]—and so, that's eyes on. I think the past five years have really, I hope, opened the public's eyes to the process in that it's not just this easy thing. Like, I think there's an assumption that it's electronic records. It's already electronic. You should be able to search, push a button, and it's there.

Reynolds: Yeah.

Oriabure: And I don't think that they realize that there's still an eyes-on review. And for email, it's a lot harder because people will put their personal email account. We're not going to release someone's personal email in the few years after the end of the administration. They're probably still using it. Personal cell phones—you conduct some business and then you'll say, "Oh, hey! You want to go to dinner? I was thinking we could do drinks here and here," that we would have to redact for privacy. So, it is not easy to just review email. And so, we had staff in multiple locations, eyes on. I would say most of the archivists now have computer glasses. I know I had to get a pair because you're just staring at the screen all day [LAUGHS], because it was pre-COVID so we weren't used to that much staring at a screen [LAUGHS].

Reynolds: Right.

Oriabure: But it was hard, because there was definitely media coverage that was not always supportive of the work of the National Archives in that effort for Kavanaugh. And it was one of the many instances where I had to realize that you just do the good work, do the best work you can, and history will reveal the truth of it, that it won't always be revealed on the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* at the time that it's happening. So, yeah, the Kavanaugh review really personally was momentous, because it was me really stepping into a leadership role for those kinds of large special-access projects. And I did well in many ways. There were some things that I was, like, "I'm going to take the 'L' on that," but, also, it's a lesson. My big thing is you can take an "L" as long as you take the lesson with it. And so, I think I'm better for it.

Reynolds: Yes. You also had January 6th, the attack on the Capitol, [that] happened under your watch here. So how did that—and I think it was a House Select Committee investigation covering that—how was that process different from the Supreme Court Justices?

Oriabure: That process was different just because the entire environment was different. Like what was happening at a national level, personally [LAUGHS], and just within the agency, was just very different. January 6th, itself, the team that the Archival Operations Division, though not responsible for Presidential transitions, we just did not have enough staff to do that. So, my staff was helping with that. And so that is going with military assistance to the White House to load up boxes. And we were still dealing with the challenges of having been quarantined for months and months on end, and then going from that to going to the White House before there was a vaccine that was widely available, you know, concerns about exposure and then you see what happened on January 6th. So that is the context of all of that. You know . . . a lot had happened.

And then we have the Presidential transition on January 20th, and the National Archives needs to stand up a Trump Library. There is no Trump Library staff. And so, because it was unexpected—we say all one-term Presidencies are unexpected transitions—no staff had been hired. So, my team of two [LAUGHS] and I became the Trump Library staff. So that was handling all of the incoming reference, which was hard, because it was not all reference. A lot of it was just commentary and thoughts about the former President, about the National Archives standing up a Presidential Library for him. People on both sides of the issue were sending in some stuff. So, there were a lot of challenging environmental conditions.

And so, the team and I, we're just plugging along trying to deal with the requests that came in, because there were several congressional requests that came in in the first months after the end of the Trump administration. And so, we received requests from other congressional committees wanting Trump Presidential records related to January 6th. So, we had already

started working on those because the first request came in March. Then the House Select Committee was stood up and they sent an expansive multiple-page request of records in August of 2021. And at that point, we still do not have any Trump Library staff, and we are trying to handle all of our responsibilities for those records, as well as the records we still have in our holdings. And so, we're plugging along as best we can. I mentioned when I was talking about the Bush Library, about the key thing for the first library staff is intellectual control. We haven't had an opportunity to get full intellectual control over the collection, because it's still months in.

And so, we get the request, start working on it, and there is marked disappointment by the committee that we are not moving as quickly as they think we should. And the Archivist is like, "We're going to be responsive to this. We are going to devote resources to this." And so, in January 2022, we basically assembled a team of 30 archivists that are from multiple Presidential Libraries, and a couple of archivists outside of the Presidential Libraries . . . that have library experience and experience reviewing Presidential records. We had purchased, in October, an e-discovery system to help facilitate our review of the email, because we were still standing up the Electronic Records Archive system to hold the Trump Presidential email. We still don't have regular access to those emails yet, so we had set that system up. Me and my team had to learn that system—October–November. We are teaching this team of 30 this system in January, and then it's gangbusters for about two months, I think, with the team, till we get through the bulk of the requests and the records that have to be reviewed.

I think the team reviewed more than two million emails. Now, this review is separate from the public release review. We don't have to do redactions. We're really reviewing "Is this responsive to the request or is it not?" because we are authorized to provide them [with] information that would normally be redacted from a public release. But still, lots and lots of records. A member of my team, Jessica Owens, I think, opened at some point more than 300 FRC boxes, because we didn't have an inventory of those yet, because we haven't had a chance. So, she basically was, like, this is a person—we do know whose files they are—who could have responsive records. So, I'm going to pull every box of this person's records and look through them. My colleague Anna Yallouris, who is just phenomenal, assisted me in managing this team because it's 30 people who will have questions. They've never worked with Trump records before. They've never worked with this e-discovery system before. So, they're going to have questions. And I couldn't field all of them while I was still dealing with the representatives of the former Presidents [and] talking to the committee staff on a regular basis. And so, there were a lot of things to juggle.

Oriabure: And I have to say, Anna and Jessica made it as least painful as possible. But it was hard. It was hard. And I was going through a personal crisis [unexpected death of my best friend of 26 years] at the same time. So, it was a lot. But I am just floored by how well NARA's staff can rise to the challenge. It's hard, because we're constantly having to rise to the challenge, but it never fails to impress [me] when we do. And so, yeah. That team was phenomenal. I'm very proud of that work, very proud of that work. But I feel like [with] each major special-access request, we learn something, and we approach the next one a little bit stronger. But they're all unique. And so, a lesson learned may not even be an issue in the next one. There will be a new thing that we hadn't thought of that we have to address. And so having seen the development from Roberts and—you know, I was not as involved—but seeing how Kagan was handled and then Kavanaugh, and we even had to do stuff for Gorsuch, and then looking at January 6th . . . it's just really impressive, the commitment and the expertise of the NARA staff.

Reynolds: Yes. And these requests are—if they're coming from Congress or, you know—these are major events for our country. And so, this has to happen fairly quickly. So, it's great how everyone has come together to work on these projects.

I am showing that it's a little after 3:00 ET. I did have a few more questions. I don't know if you have additional time or if you want to set up another call or . . . ?

Oriabure: I actually have additional time if you want to try to finish and go through all your questions.

Reynolds: Okay. Okay. Yeah, that'd be great. I just wanted to be cognizant of your time here.

Oriabure: I respect that.

Reynolds: So, you did talk a little bit about the Trump transition, and then you also went through Bush 43 and Obama. Does the office provide guidance to the White House regarding Presidential Libraries and what they should be doing with records? Do you have any input on that?

Oriabure: Yes. There is official guidance on the Presidential Records Act and responsibilities that White House staff have that is provided by NARA. It's actually on Archives.gov as well. And then during an actual transition, there are weekly and, at some point, daily meetings with White House Counsel, the White House Office of Records Management, and then some of the offices that are creating records that will have to be transferred, like the Photo Office and the Gift Office. So, yes, there is a lot of dialogue back and forth between the National Archives and

White House staff on the transfer. And what has gotten more complicated is the born-digital records. And what has gotten a little bit more straightforward are the textual records because, with some key exceptions that have been in the news, people package their records up. They get them to White House Office of Records Management. The National Archives picks them up from the White House Office of Records Management or the National Security Council secures them appropriately. And then we go from there.

The born-digital records transfer is a little bit more complicated because, yes, there are records, but they're normally in records systems. And so how we get them out of the records systems, how we do the transfer—because we're talking about terabytes of data right now—that is the complicated thing. And so that requires a lot of collaboration and dialogue. You have those complicated meetings to transition, and also there's fun things that you do, like, I have gotten to ride on a military plane when we were moving classified records to Dallas for the Bush 43 Library, and to the Chicago area for the Obama Library. So that is an experience, you know, going to an Air Force Base at an incredibly early hour [LAUGHS] in the day where there is no sun anywhere in the sky and getting on that plane, which is not like getting on a regular plane and just sitting there. I don't know how to describe it. I just feel so blessed that I've had a chance to experience it.

Even with the electronic records, with Bush 43, that was the first administration where we brought in a significant volume of electronic records that, I think, doubled NARA's holdings of electronic records. I think—don't quote me on that. Well, I guess you are quoting me on that. And we had to build the system that would hold it, and that system is the foundation for the systems that hold all the Presidential and Vice Presidential records that we've received since. And so, like I said, [I'm] not a technologist, but I had fun in those meetings explaining archival work, archival management. I had a lot of fun hearing them talk. And I would just write down words . . . I'm going to have to Google that later because I don't quite know what that means. I'm not going to stop the flow of the meeting for this because I'm going to use my context clues. I'm going to look this up. There was a lot of looking up in the early days of that transition. But yeah, the transitions, in some ways, there is a formula to them, but every administration is unique and so you have to learn how to go with the flow.

Reynolds: So, what was your particular responsibility as part of these transitions?

Oriabure: I was just a helper and jumped in to do whatever needed to be done, except for Bush 43. I was very much responsible for the electronic records transfer [along with Kate Dillon McClure and Sam McClure] as well as information gathering—meeting with the records creators in the White House to understand, "When the records are in the system like this, this is

what it means. These codes that we use that are in the data you're going to receive, that's what they mean. So that will assist you in searching and in understanding the records." But some of the other things I did were very basic—putting stickers on boxes. With Bush 43 and Obama, we didn't have just one shipment of records to the library site. We had a series of boxes, I mean, trucks and then a plane and planes. And so, the White House would clear certain boxes to be sent to the library. They were like, "We are sure we don't need this recalled. It can go ahead and go." And so, it was very basic. You had the list, you had your stickers, and you would go down the aisle, find the box, put the sticker on so that the military, when they were building the pallets, knew these are the boxes that are ready to go. So, I would do things like that, being with the military personnel as they were building pallets—especially the classified pallets—because you would need someone who has a security clearance there for that. So, some of it was really just that escorting, being a NARA presence there. Some of it was hands-on basics and everything else.

Reynolds: Did you notice any major differences between the transitions? I know you mentioned, like, Bush 43 and Obama and Trump. Were there any major differences that you noticed between those transitions in terms of your position and records?

Oriabure: I mean, I don't think there was a difference in the records per se. I think the biggest difference was probably the Trump administration transition, because we did not have a physical library site separate from Archives I at the end of the administration. So, we would be bringing in the records to the Archives I Building in downtown Washington, DC, and then that would be the end—versus Obama, Bush 43, and previous administrations, [where] we would bring in the records and then that's just the start, because then we would have to prepare to send them to the library. And so, in some ways, that made the Trump transition a little less complicated.

Reynolds: Hmm. Okay. So, does the Trump administration today essentially have a website where you can access some of this information . . . because I know they don't have the physical library, like you just said? So, is it essentially [that] the records are stored at Archives II or wherever, and then the public can access through the website?

Oriabure: The records are stored at Archives II right now, and the Trump Library does have a website. I think it's Trumplibrary.gov, and the public, just like any other Presidential Library, can find out information about the administration, the holdings, and all of that on the website and contact the library staff that way.

Reynolds: Okay, I see. Let's see here . . . One other thing I wanted to ask about was the move of classified records from the downtown Archives to Archives II. Were you involved in that process?

Oriabure: A little bit. Yes, yes. So, for the move of the Trump records from downtown to Archives II . . . the military did most of the physical labor of building the pallets. But I was there as a national security clearance holder to provide oversight escort for that. So, it's weird, because you're just standing there while people are doing this work, but you have to stand there and have eyes on—not that they're going to open a box, but just in case. So, yes. And part of my responsibilities was to be the Information Security Personnel Manager, ISPM, so I was responsible for the management of all the SCIFs, the secure vaults for our office, as well as making sure that everyone who has a security clearance had checked all their boxes about notifying about foreign travel, taking training, all of that. And so, in this wonderful role [LAUGHS], I was responsible for all the combinations and just accessing all those spaces. And so that was one of the ways I contributed was just managing that.

Reynolds: Mhm. Okay. Well, that's still a big job to take on. So, let's see here . . . You left NARA. Was that in December of 2023?

Oriabure: Yes. I think, because my first day with the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Review Board was December 2nd. So, I would say the end of November . . . was my last day with NARA.

Reynolds: Okay. And so how many years had you worked at NARA when you left?

Oriabure: Oh gosh, let me think. So full time, I started March 2002. So, it was 21, almost 22 years. I like to say I started when I was [CROSS-TALKING], but you know. [LAUGHS]

Reynolds: Mhm. Wow! So, did they do anything—your team members? Did they do anything for you when you left NARA?

Oriabure: Yes. I felt bad because it was right before the holidays, and one thing we haven't talked about is the Biden Vice Presidential records and the work on that in the past year. But there was a lot of work, and it was very busy. And I was like, "Y'all don't have to do anything big, because that's not really my scene anyway. And I know you're busy. We're still going to be friends. I'll see you again. This is not the end." But they still put together a really nice gathering in one of the conference rooms at Archives I, and it was just sweet. They brought all my favorite treats, because being together with this group of people for 17 years, they know what I like to eat. [LAUGHS] And so they brought all my treats, and just people from across the agency who

I've gotten to work with were there. One thing that really just floored me is one of the archivists I worked with at the Bush Library—who is here working for the second part of the division of offices [from the Presidential Materials Division], and she is the Presidential Diarist—came to the party, and she was the one who did some of my initial training as an archivist. So, it was kind of a full-circle moment. . . She and Kate Dillon McClure and Sam McClure were all there. They're all still NARA employees. But they all started at the Bush Library, so we had a Bush Library OG [colloquialism “Original Gangsters” or “Old Guard” referring to foundational members] picture. But yeah, it was a wonderful gathering and very much like what I wanted—low key. There were no speeches. It was just people enjoying time together and, of course, good treats.

Reynolds: Mhm. Yeah. Sounds lovely. You mentioned the Biden . . . records. Did you want to mention something about that?

Oriabure: Well, I would just say that, in January of 2023, the Biden Vice Presidential records became subject to the Freedom of Information Act request. This was the first time that a sitting President had his VP [Vice Presidential] records available to public request. And as we anticipated, there was a huge clamoring for those records. And . . . I shouldn't say 2023. I think it was 2022. Is that right? I think it was 2022 . . . So, there's tons of public requests for that. Some of those public requests have turned into FOIA lawsuits, as well. There have been some congressional special-access requests for those records. And so, the team has been juggling all of that. Thankfully, there's a wonderful team of archivists that have been hired for the Trump Library. So that responsibility [of handling special access requests for Trump Presidential records] has been taken off [the plate of the Archival Operations Division staff]. But surely, there's still a lot more work to be done. And so, I would say that navigating that and learning a new set of representatives and walking through that process . . . I guess it's full circle kind of. This makes sense that my time at NARA would end in this way with these kinds of things, because it really represents a lot of the issues I've dealt with throughout my career.

Reynolds: Well, it sounds like they must really miss you because of all of this, because you were there so long, and you've got all this background and experience. So, I'm sure that they really miss not having you there now. Is there anything, in particular, you miss about NARA?

Oriabure: The people. Yeah. . . They really symbolize public service. So, I miss all of them. But the good thing is I still get to see them. In some ways, I feel like I've seen some of my colleagues [LAUGHS] more now that I've left than before, because the ones that I was not working with day to day, they've made sure to, like, "Let's go to dinner! Let's go to brunch!" We'll just check in and say, "How are you doing?" So . . . I miss the people. And I want to say I miss the records.

But it's more than the records. I miss that magic moment of connecting a request or a member of the public, whoever, with the record that they wanted or the record that they didn't know they wanted, but they actually needed. Like that, I miss that moment.

Reynolds: We've covered a lot in this time. Is there anything else that you want to mention that we haven't talked about yet?

Oriabure: Oh, gosh. I could talk about it forever. More than anything, I just so appreciate my time at NARA. I'm very much the person I am today because I worked at NARA.

Reynolds: Mhm. Do you see yourself ever coming back?

Oriabure: [LAUGHS] Maybe. Maybe. I mean, the job that I'm in is a term-appointment, so I will be looking for a job at some point in the future. I mean, the good thing about an organization that's growing and thriving [WIPES TEARS] is that it grows and thrives. So, I know if I come back to NARA, it's not going to be the NARA I left. But it will still have great people and a great mission. So . . . I would consider it.

Reynolds: [LAUGHS] Well, I think all of your former teammates are going to be listening to this then and holding you to it, so . . . [LAUGHS]

Oriabure: Oh my gosh! I'm like, "Did I mention all the names I need to mention?" I mean, they're just so many people I've worked with, and I will just throw in this joke. I never thought in my wildest dreams I would have gotten to meet the people I've gotten to meet and sit in so many meetings with so many lawyers. And I say that specifically for Gary M. Stern [LAUGHS] and for Hannah Bergman, because I always was like, [WHISPERING] "Why are there so many lawyers on this call?" It's really a blessing to know that the career I had is beyond the imaginings that I had for it.

Reynolds: Mhm. Right. From when you first started out and, you know, graduating from college and then to all the experiences that you had while you were working here, just amazing. Yeah.

Oriabure: I had no idea that I would be, you know, a little girl from Dallas, Texas, doing all this stuff. So, I appreciate it, and I think if anyone's going to listen to this, the one thing I would want them [to take away] is to be open to possibilities. Be flexible with your plan changing, because my entire career has been flexible and just being in the right place at the right time and willing to say, "Oh, I didn't even think that was an option. But, okay, I'll jump in and do that!" Yeah.

Reynolds: Yes. Well, you've certainly had some wonderful experiences, and I'm really happy that you were open to sharing them with me. I know Jessie was really excited about me getting to talk to you. So, thank you so much for everything that you've talked about during this time. I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording now. Would you mind just holding on for one more second?

Oriabure: Okay.

Reynolds: Thank you.

[END RECORDING]