

# Interview with George Fleischli

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Interview # 1: January 27, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, January 27, 2010. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm with George Fleischli. Good morning, George.

Fleischli: Good morning.

DePue: This is part of our continuing project on the Jim Edgar administration. I'm excited about having the opportunity to talk to you. Certainly talking to other people in the administration and the governor and those who are closest to him, your name came up an awful lot. It was obvious that this is an important interview, so I appreciate your willingness to take some time out of your busy schedule. Let's start off with the basics. I'm going to ask you when and where you were born.

Fleischli: Springfield, Illinois. February 2, 1944.

DePue: Had your family been here for quite a while?

Fleischli: My father was in the service at that time, so he was... Yeah, both of them were raised in Springfield, but they were in and out.

DePue: He was in the service during World War II, obviously.

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: What branch, and what did he end up doing?

Fleischli: He was a doctor and he didn't go overseas, but I think he was in Alabama. I'm not really sure of that, but I think most of his time, he spent in Alabama at a base there.

DePue: Did you grow up in Springfield, then?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: What was your mother's occupation?

Fleischli: She was a housewife. Well, she was a nurse, but then, probably when I was five or six years old, she quit being a nurse. But she was a registered nurse.

DePue: Have any brothers and sisters?

Fleischli: I have two brothers and two sisters.

DePue: Where did you fit into the—

Fleischli: I was second oldest.

DePue: What was it like growing up in Springfield in those days—1950s, early '60s?

Fleischli: I don't know what you want. We had fun, we did things. It was kind of normal, I guess; a normal childhood.

DePue: Where did you go to school?

Fleischli: I went to high school—is that what you're—

DePue: Grade school and high school.

Fleischli: I went to Saint Agnes Grade School and Griffin High School.

DePue: Where was Griffin located at that time?

Fleischli: Where it is now. On West Washington Street.

DePue: Saint Agnes, you say, was a grade school?

Fleischli: Yeah. I think the Stratton Building is where it was.

DePue: What were the things that got you motivated when you were in high school? Did you have any extracurricular activities?

Fleischli: I think I played football for four years. I played basketball for a couple years. I played baseball for three or four years. So sports probably did—normal kid growing up.

DePue: Did you have any jobs growing up?

Fleischli: Yeah, I worked every summer and some part-time jobs.

DePue: Growing up in the '50s and early '60s, do you remember your parents talking about politics at all?

Fleischli: Not a whole lot. I think around election time they probably would, like everyone else, notice that there was an election coming up and do it. But it wasn't a primary topic, no.

DePue: Were you church-goers?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: Where did you go to church?

Fleischli: Saint Agnes and probably Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church.

DePue: And your high school years. What did you think in terms of your future? In terms of a career?

Fleischli: I was just waiting for the next day sometimes. I thought about veterinary medicine. I thought about teaching. I thought about quite a few things. I went to school and ended up being a teacher.

DePue: Now there was a draft during that timeframe. But you would have graduated from high school in what year?

Fleischli: '62.

DePue: So '62 was a time when there was a lot of deferment as well. Did you look at going to college once you graduated?

Fleischli: I hurt my knee playing football and was called for my physical and went through the old rigmarole in St. Louis. Right at the end, they told me that I was not eligible for the draft. I think I told you the other day, 1-Y deferment or something like that. If they needed me, they'd bring me up—I can't remember exactly—but I would probably not be front line, but probably do something in the office or whatever. But it ended up I was not called.

DePue: Do you remember the year, roughly, that you went to your physical?

Fleischli: It was probably '63 or '64, somewhere in there.

DePue: A little before they really started to ramp things up for Vietnam, but by that time you had a serious deferment anyway, sounds like.

Fleischli: Vietnam was on everybody's mind. A lot of people went there. So maybe it was '65. I can't remember exactly what year it was.

DePue: You said you went to Bradley University?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: What did you major in at Bradley?

Fleischli: Education, minor in English.

DePue: Were you thinking that you wanted to be a teacher once you got done with this?

Fleischli: Yes. Absolutely.

DePue: Why teaching?

Fleischli: I can't answer that. I just migrated toward that. I thought I wanted to coach football, and that was a natural. In those days, you had to teach at the school in order to coach and have a teaching degree in order to coach. So that was one of the things. I enjoyed sports.

DePue: Anything that you remember in particular about your college experience at Bradley?

Fleischli: I don't understand which way you're going with that.

DePue: Any special memories you have about the college experience?

Fleischli: Yeah. A lot of buildings (laughs). The old main building burnt down. (laughter) That was one night. That shocked everybody. There was a lot of dissension on Vietnam, the war. They started protesting. It was a time of equal rights. There were some black protests, things like that.

DePue: What year did you graduate from college, then?

Fleischli: '67. The year I hurt my knee, I was out for a semester. So '67.

DePue: In other words, one year before things really got kind of crazy in the United States, '68—started with the Tet Offensive, then the Martin Luther King assassination and riots in Chicago, and the election campaign and all. Some memorable years, then, when you were coming of age.

Fleischli: You're right.

DePue: What did you think about all of the politics? The protests against the Vietnam War, for example, and the civil rights movement?

Fleischli: I probably disagreed with the protests against the war. I can't remember exactly, but I probably disagreed with it. Civil rights, I agreed with. I thought that was something that should happen. I didn't feel like it affected me. It was something

that was always somebody else. We played sports, and everybody was welcome as long as they could play.

DePue: '67 is the year you have to figure out what you're going to do for a job. Where did you go and look for that?

Fleischli: I taught in Peoria for a while. I taught at Peoria Central.

DePue: Taught English?

Fleischli: I think I taught physical education and one English class at Peoria Central. Then I came back here and taught at Griffin.

DePue: You recall the reason for coming back to Springfield?

Fleischli: No. I think it was available and I think I probably made a little bit more money, if you believe that.

DePue: Going to parochial school from a public school?

Fleischli: Yeah.

DePue: What did you end up doing at Griffin High School, then? Teaching English?

Fleischli: Teaching. And I was assistant football coach, and then I was the head football coach.

DePue: How was the football team while you were there?

Fleischli: Good. The couple years before I became the head coach, they weren't really good. But in my four years as a head coach, I think we only lost five games in four years or something like that. Six games.

DePue: What was it about football that especially attracted you, that you liked, in terms of coaching?

Fleischli: That's a hard question for you to ask me. Compared to what? (laughs) It's a team game. I don't know. It was just something that I liked.

DePue: Were you involved in politics at all, at that time?

Fleischli: No.

DePue: Do you know if you were registered for one of the parties? Do you recall?

Fleischli: I probably voted Republican.

DePue: How would you describe your political views at that time?

Fleischli: Conservative.

DePue: What was the tradition in the family?

Fleischli: My mother's family was probably Irish-Catholic Democrats, and my father was a Republican.

DePue: So growing up, you got a little dose of both of them.

Fleischli: Got a little bit of both of them, yes.

DePue: I know that—you mentioned before—you ran for street commissioner for the City of Springfield.

Fleischli: Correct.

DePue: What was the reason behind that decision?

Fleischli: I don't know. Some people talked to me about it and I thought it was the right thing to do. There was no driving force or anything like that. Some people just talked to me. I think it was because I had some success as a football coach and my name was kind of out there. I was getting some positive press, and they talked to me about running. And I did it.

DePue: In Springfield at that time, would this have been a non-political position that you'd be running for? You didn't have to necessarily declare a party?

Fleischli: Correct.

DePue: Do you recall—was it Republicans or Democrats that approached you on it?

Fleischli: It was probably both. It was some citizens. No, I don't know what they were, to be very honest with you. They just approached me.

DePue: I'm assuming you did not win the election. Is that right?

Fleischli: No, I did not.

DePue: Did you give any more serious thought after that about getting more involved in politics?

Fleischli: You mean as far as running for office?

DePue: Yes, or participating in the local Republican or Democratic Party at the time.

Fleischli: I knew I wasn't going to run for office anymore. I think I helped some, or was probably **for** some particular candidates. I wasn't real active or real vocal.

DePue: Why did you decide, "I don't want to run for office anymore"?

Fleischli: I didn't like it.

DePue: (chuckles) What about it didn't you like?

Fleischli: I don't want to say the scrutiny, but... I don't know, I just didn't like it. (laughs) It was one of those things.

DePue: In 1979 or that timeframe, you mentioned a few days ago that you went to the Department of Natural Resources. What motivated that decision and that move?

Fleischli: Money. It was a better job. I had two young kids at home. I thought it was a move for the family.

DePue: What was the job that you got?

Fleischli: I was Assistant Director of the Young Adult Conservation Corps, which put out-of-work and out-of-school dropout kids to work in the state parks. It was a federally-funded program; the money was funneled from the feds to the Department of Natural Resources.

DePue: Did you like that job?

Fleischli: Yep. Liked it a lot.

DePue: Did they approach you or did you approach them?

Fleischli: I think they approached me. I think it was out there, that I was looking. I can't remember Scott's last name; it was a director—he talked to me about it. I think it was kind of natural, from being a coach and a teacher, to move into that. You're dealing with high school kids.

DePue: You said the Director of the Department of Natural Resources at the time, approached you?

Fleischli: No, the Director of the Young Adult Conservation Corps.

DePue: I'm guessing that one of the reasons you had the visibility is because you had been a coach at Griffin.

Fleischli: Yeah, I think so. I think that certainly opened some doors for me, yes.

DePue: How long did you stay with that position?

Fleischli: About two years, then I moved with Jim Edgar to the secretary of state's office.

DePue: Let's talk about the decision, then, to go to the secretary of state's office. How did that come about?

Fleischli: I talked to some people and told them that I'd love to move and try to help myself and better myself and make some more money. Being humble, I think I did a pretty good job in the Conservation Corps. I think I made a good reputation of being someone to jump in and do what had to be done. The Director of Physical Services for the secretary of state's office was naturally going to be open because of Edgar's appointment. I got an interview, talked to Edgar, we hit it off, and he hired me.

DePue: Was that right at the beginning of his administration?

Fleischli: That was even before. I think I interviewed with him before he was sworn in.

DePue: I believe he was sworn in around January of 1981.<sup>1</sup>

Fleischli: Yeah. I think you're right. I'm not 100 percent sure.

DePue: Right at the beginning of that term. Of course, he had not been elected; he had been appointed.

Fleischli: Correct.

DePue: Did you know Edgar at all before that time?

Fleischli: Just vaguely. Just a little bit.

DePue: Just by reputation?

Fleischli: Yeah.

DePue: What was your impression when you sat down and talked to him at this job interview?

Fleischli: I wanted to work for him. He was a good man. Very straightforward and... We hit it off. I think he took a liking to me, and I certainly did to him.

DePue: The position you said you got was what again?

Fleischli: Director of Physical Services for the secretary of state's office. We took care of the buildings and grounds in the Capitol Complex. We had inventory. We had motor pool. We had new construction, maintenance, parking lots—things like that.

DePue: Especially people who are not in Illinois might be surprised by the expansive role of the secretary of state in Illinois. Can you talk about, specifically, what the role of the secretary of state is?

Fleischli: I think we ought to (laughs) let the secretary of state explain that. The secretary of state in Illinois does a lot more things than just issue driver's licenses. My role as

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar was sworn in January 5, 1981.



Director of Physical Services is an example of that. We did maintenance and construction, assigned parking places, maintained parking lots. So it's much more than just assigning driver's licenses and license plates.

DePue: In that role, were you responsible, then, for all of the facilities for the secretary of state's office throughout the entire state?

Fleischli: Any that the state owned. Most of the facilities are leased facilities. We would lease from them, and Driver Services was responsible for the lease arrangements. We had three facilities in Chicago that the state owned, which I was responsible for—or our department was responsible for—and all the buildings in the Capitol Complex. Not just secretary of state buildings. We took care of the Capitol Building, the Willard Ice Building, the Stratton Building. All buildings.

DePue: The archives?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: The state library?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: The state museum?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: Any particular headaches at that litany of buildings in the Capitol Complex?

Fleischli: They're all headaches, to keep old buildings functioning. It was always too hot or too cold. We had a four-pipe system that took three days to turn around, so if it got warm, it would take three days for it to cool off. By the time it would cool, it would need to be heated again. (laughs) So yeah, there were problems. Just normal problems that you have with the job.

DePue: I know that the secretary of state's office had secretary of state police. Were you involved with them at all?

Fleischli: I was involved with them, but I was not in charge of them. I had the security in those buildings. In those days, we had a security force in the buildings that did not carry weapons. That was under our Physical Services Department. The secretary of state police, who are sworn officers, were on their own. We worked together a lot, but they were on their own.

DePue: This might be a question you can't really answer. Do you know why—this is typical government bureaucracy—you had your own security force in the Capitol Building, which wasn't part of the secretary of state police and wasn't part of any other police force, as far as I can tell?

Fleischli: What's your question?

DePue: Why that arrangement?

Fleischli: I don't know. We inherited it. I can't answer that. It was building security. We checked people coming in. We made the rounds at night. I don't think it's too far out of the question. You don't have sworn officers doing that, normally.

DePue: Did they go through any kind of special training for that?

Fleischli: Yeah. I mean, they didn't spend six weeks at the police school, but we had a training course. We explained things. It was probably less secure then, or less emphasis then, because we didn't have the threat from terrorists and things like that that we have today. We had sign-in, sign-out. We checked offices, things like that.

DePue: You weren't too far into your service as the Director of Physical Services when there was a serious equal rights amendment fight that happened right in the Capitol Building itself, and certainly in the Capitol Complex. I wanted to ask you your reflections of the two sides of that argument, in terms of how they conducted themselves and the challenges that presented you. So let's start with the National Organization of Women, because they were certainly pushing very hard to get the equal rights amendment passed.

Fleischli: First of all, "fight" is not the right term. It was more of a demonstration. I don't think there were really any fights, but there were threats of it, I guess. It was a very trying time. We had a group of—I can't remember now, I think they were all women—who chained themselves together in the Capitol. Would not leave. They were very vocal. As I said, it was a trying time. I think it was a Republican House at the time—was doing something with the amendment, and they were naturally against (chuckles) what the Republican House was doing. It was a trying time. We had twenty-four hours a day we had to be here. Twenty-four hours a day we were watching for something to happen. At the end, they threw blood all over the front of the governor's office.

DePue: The Senate chamber, I think it was.

Fleischli: Was it the Senate chamber? I don't know. I don't think it was the Senate chamber. I think it was in front of the governor's office. But they threw pig's blood all over everything. They were arrested, taken to jail. It kind of diffused itself after a while, but it was a very hard and trying time. We were all involved with it. We tried to respect both sides, the opinions of both sides, but we had to keep order in the building.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> After the defeat of ERA in the Illinois Senate on June 25, 1982, nine women from A Grassroots Group of Second Class Citizens pour blood in front of the House and Senate doors, as well as the windows of and entrance to the governor's office. They also wrote the names of the governor, Speaker, and other legislators, in

DePue: Do you remember how the issue was resolved when the women chained themselves to the door of the—was it the House or the Senate chambers?

Fleischli: Yeah, I think it was the House chambers, because they were really opposed to a Republican House. The Senate was a Democratic Senate, I think, at that time. [Philip] Rock was in charge. What was your question?

DePue: How did that end up being resolved? Was it your security guards who resolved it, or were they bringing in some outside police to deal with it?

Fleischli: They brought in our security, and the secretary of state police were in charge. When they were arrested, naturally they were arrested to the City of Springfield; they brought the city police in. But the city or state police did not come in the buildings.

DePue: Let's talk about the Capitol reconstruction, then, because I know that was another significant chore you had when you were in that position.

Fleischli: Yes. We redid the interior of the building. Those who were around at the time remember that there were three floors of scaffolding. The scaffolding started on the first floor and went up to the third floor and then went up to the dome. We cleaned the interior dome, redid the statues, the pillars. Everything was very dirty. Sometime in the thirties, I think, there was a fire in the Capitol. The dome acted almost like a chimney. The billows brought all the soot and so forth up into the dome.<sup>3</sup>

When we got up there, we found there was stained glass that we didn't know was there. We got a lot of press on it, very positive press on the cleaning of that. And we did the outside of the building, also. We tuck-pointed and cleaned the limestone, reset a lot of the things. Edgar's point was—and I went right along with him—that we wanted to bring it back to the original look of the building. You probably don't remember, but they had 1950s aluminum doors on the hearing rooms, and we got rid of those. Found somebody who copied and made doors that were as close to the original as we could. We got some of the original hardware. We tried to bring the building back to what it was. We were very conscious about the cleanliness of the building.<sup>4</sup>

DePue: As I recall, in the process of doing that you discovered there were some murals and artwork on some of the walls in some of the rooms?

Fleischli: That's a little bit before my time. That was room 400. They opened that room up. It was sealed. They found the murals that are still there today. They found them.

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blood, on the floor. *Chicago Tribune*, June 26, 1982. For Edgar's discussion of these events, see Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 15, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln, Presidential Library, Springfield, IL (ALPL), 67-70.

<sup>3</sup> The fire occurred July 9, 1933. *Chicago Tribune*, July 10, 1933.

<sup>4</sup> On the quality of Fleischli's work and the favorable attention it received, see Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, June 4, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 34-36.

But that was a little bit before my time. It was in a normal reconstruction, when they did that.

DePue: So the attempt was to take it back to the construction, which I believe was 1870s, 1880?

Fleischli: Yeah, I think so. Over the years, they wanted to make a mezzanine on the second floor, and there was this ornate ceiling. Edgar didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do it. It was Governor Thompson at that time. It was his staff that was there. They were fighting to make a mezzanine, to get more offices, which ruined the ceiling. It was not the right thing to do, we thought. Edgar and I went to talk to Thompson. We took him on a tour and he agreed with us 100 percent. I think we did some positive things. I think every secretary of state from that time on has continued along those lines to keep the Capitol, especially—that's a very historic building and a very beautiful building—to keep it as well as we could, and to keep it as it was originally.

DePue: Which one was the more significant challenge, doing the interior or the exterior work?

Fleischli: The challenge, as far as being hard to do, was the exterior, because we had to scaffold and get up there and find the same kind of limestone, and things like that. As far as the heat we got for it, (both chuckle) the scaffolding of the inside and how we had the inside for almost six months where you could hardly get around—we got a lot of flak from people on that.

DePue: From the legislators?

Fleischli: Legislators, even tourists—people like that. They can't understand why they couldn't get to the third floor, and this and that. Progress has its price.

DePue: Now, the Capitol was hardly the only building or facility that you had to worry about. What were some of the other challenges or significant improvements that you were making in some other facilities?

Fleischli: We tried to bring all the buildings up to a certain cleanliness that we didn't think was there. Secondly, we tried not to take away any historic significance, such as the Archives Building and buildings that have been around for a while.<sup>5</sup> It's the Howlett Building now, where the secretary of state is housed. We tried to bring all those things back, within the limited funds that we had, to as original as we could. Stratton Building was probably the hardest building because it was falling apart. The windows were bad, the heating was bad. The pipes, the air conditioning and ventilating, were bad. Probably we had more challenges there than anywhere. We worked with the museum to do some stuff with them. They were all challenging. When you take care of—as I said earlier—older buildings, trying to keep them up is challenging.

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<sup>5</sup> The Archives Building was renamed the Margaret Cross Norton Building in 1995.

DePue: Isn't it the Stratton Building that has the dubious reputation of being one of the ugliest buildings in the Capitol Complex?

Fleischli: I guess beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but I would agree with that. (laughs) Yes.

DePue: Willard Ice Building. When was that constructed? Was that during your tenure?

Fleischli: Yes, it was. I can't remember exactly the years, but there was kind of a hassle on who was going to do the maintenance of that building. The Department of Revenue thought they were going to do it themselves. The statute says that we do it. We had several meetings and it ended up that we were the ones who did the maintenance on the building.

DePue: The Willard Ice Building is distinctive in that it doesn't meet the architectural themes of the rest of the Capitol Complex. Your thoughts on that?

Fleischli: You're being kind. (both chuckle) Yes. I had nothing to do with the design of the building. Edgar had nothing to do with the design of the building. Because if we'd had anything to do with it, it would not look like it does now. (laughs) Edgar, in later years, was very much involved in the development of the new state library. We tried to make that look like it had been here for a while, and I think we did a pretty good job of it.

DePue: So that it fit in with the rest of the architecture of the complex?

Fleischli: Correct.

DePue: I know he's very proud of that state library, and he's certainly told me the story of the discussion he had with Governor Thompson at the time, when Thompson had to admit when it was built, "Jim, you were right."<sup>6</sup> (laughter) How closely did you work with then-Secretary of State Edgar and his senior staff? You were part of the senior staff, certainly. How closely did you interact with him?

Fleischli: Not daily, but sometimes five times a day. Other days, I wouldn't meet with him for a few days. It wasn't any set schedule. He was very open when he needed us or we needed him. We would sit down and discuss things.

DePue: I'm going to put you on the spot here a little bit and let you reflect, and then tell me what words, what adjectives, if you will, you would use to describe Edgar during that timeframe.

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<sup>6</sup> Edgar shares this story and talks about the process of building the new library, especially the importance he placed on a particular aesthetic vision, in his interview with Mark DePue, June 22, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 69-75.

Fleischli: Same way today. Very conscientious. On top of things. Wants to be involved in decisions, but will allow you to give your point of view. I don't want to say easy to work with, but I think he does things the right way.

DePue: Would you describe him as a demanding boss?

Fleischli: Yes, demanding, but that's not all bad. I don't want to say that in a bad way. He set certain standards and you had to live up to them.

DePue: Did you enjoy the opportunity to work with Edgar?

Fleischli: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DePue: We're getting toward the end of his service as secretary of state. Obviously, in 1989 or so, he decides to run for governor. Were you involved at all with the election campaign?

Fleischli: Yeah. After working, weekends and days off, and things like that. Yeah, I was very involved. I thought Edgar was what Illinois needed. I always did. I wasn't selfish; I had a job. Probably would have been better off. I loved my job at the secretary of state's office. If we stayed there forever, I'd have stayed there forever. But I think Illinois needed Edgar. And yeah, I was involved, trying to help all I could.

DePue: Did he ask you or did you volunteer to help?

Fleischli: Both, probably. It was a given. We were all going to be there. Edgar had a unique way of inspiring people to help him out.

DePue: Do you recall the parameters that he told people like yourself and others who had jobs with the state, in terms of how you could participate in the campaign?

Fleischli: Make sure you did it on your time, not the state's time. That was a hard and fast rule.

DePue: Let's get toward the end of the campaign. I've obviously interviewed Governor Edgar about this already—and Carter Hendren and others who were much more involved in the political side of that. He wasn't sure at all—in fact, he was pretty convinced toward the end that he was not going to be successful. It was a very tight campaign. Do you recall what your thoughts were at the time?<sup>7</sup>

Fleischli: Edgar said that he thought he wasn't going to win? I think Edgar would say it was a toss-up, but I don't think we ever thought we were behind. I can remember on a Sunday night, we went to Edgar's house. Carter, Mike Lawrence, myself, and Edgar met. Jim had been all over the state, running around. He looked thin and worn-out, and Brenda [Edgar] was not happy about some things. It was a very dark day. That's when I thought things were really going the wrong way. I believed in

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<sup>7</sup> See Jim Edgar's interview sessions 9 with Mark DePue, September 2, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project.

Edgar throughout the whole campaign. We ran against Hartigan the first time, and I just thought that Edgar had a better grasp of what was needed and so forth. I suspect that's because I was partisan and I worked with the guy, but I really did believe in what he was saying. But yeah, in most campaigns, there are some ups and downs. But I never thought that we were really dead in the water. I thought it was very tight. I thought it could go one way or another. And it did; it ended up being a very tight race.

DePue: I think the governor would certainly agree with you. He felt it could go either way, but there were moments when he was thinking that maybe it was leaning more against his favor than for. I believe the people inside, like Carter, were more optimistic about the final outcome.

Fleischli: I worked closely with Carter. Carter and I are good friends; he and I did a lot of things together. I never saw a doomsday, a gloom, all is lost. There were good days. There were bad days. There were things that happened, but we had the right message. We were very honest and upfront. I think we had a great organization. We organized the state, politically, very well. So I was positive all along.

DePue: The outcome, obviously, is that he won a very close election. When was it that you started being considered for a different position in the governor's office?<sup>8</sup>

Fleischli: I don't want to sound vain when I say this, but I think it was a given that I was going with Edgar. I remember talking to the Ryan administration, and they asked me what I was going to do. I said, "Well, I haven't been offered anything yet, but I think I'm going with Edgar." So it was one of those things.

DePue: Did you approach Edgar or some of his people about your desire to be in the administration?

Fleischli: I can't remember approaching. As I said, I think it was just that Edgar knew there were some people going with him. We just didn't know where we were going to land.

DePue: Why don't you tell us where you did end up and how you ended up in that position.

Fleischli: How I ended up? Because the governor gave me the position. They called it Executive Assistant, which was a cabinet position. There were five of us, I guess. Four, five, six—something like that. We would meet every week as a staff with the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and Mike Lawrence, who was the Director of Communications. Each of us was assigned a particular group of agencies. Those agencies reported to us. We were responsible for them. We, in turn, would work with the governor. If the governor had anything he wanted to know about, he'd talk to us first.

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<sup>8</sup> Edgar defeated Hartigan 1,653,126-1,569,217, a margin of 83,909 votes. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 6, 1990*.

DePue: Am I correct that this was something of a super cabinet that the governor had?

Fleischli: The press referred to it as a super cabinet, so I don't know. We didn't give it that name, I don't think.

DePue: Was that something that was new to the Edgar administration? It hadn't been in existence for Thompson?

Fleischli: I'm not sure. It had not been in with Thompson, no. I think Ogilvie had something along these lines. I'm not sure of that, but somebody once told me that. But no, it was not under Thompson.

DePue: What were the agencies and departments that you had purview over?

Fleischli: I had the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, Transportation, Tollway in Chicago, and the Racing Board.

DePue: The Racing Board? And you also said the Department of Transportation?

Fleischli: Yes. Transportation and the Tollway.

DePue: Was it the Department of Natural Resources then?

Fleischli: No, it was Department of Conservation then.

DePue: Environmental Protection Agency was not part of that?

Fleischli: No, it was not. Al Grosboll had that.

DePue: And how about Historic Preservation?

Fleischli: No, that was Al Grosboll also.

DePue: Was there a common theme between these agencies that were under your purview, then?

Fleischli: I can't answer that. I think, naturally, the Tollway and Department of Transportation would be. I guess Ag and Conservation had a tie, and the Racing Board, because of its tie to agriculture. So yeah, I guess there was a tie.

DePue: But the Racing Board. There's some politically dangerous turf sometimes in the Racing Board, at least in the history a couple decades before in Illinois.

Fleischli: I think you're wrong on that. I don't think it was the board; it was individuals on the board. I think the board and the agency that reports to the board have always been above board. There have been very, very few scandals in Illinois racing. We've got scandals with governors who screwed around with Illinois racing. (DePue laughs) That was outside of what the Racing Board did. I don't think the Racing Board has any black marks.



DePue: That's a good point, because it was Otto Kerner back in the '60s, long before you got there.<sup>9</sup> I wonder if you can address the relationship between the governor, and you as executive assistant?

Fleischli: EAs. We were referred to in the paper as EAs, executive assistants.

DePue: And then the directors of these various agencies. What was the relationship there?

Fleischli: I would meet with all my directors almost weekly. Every morning, I had one of them in, just to bring me up to date on what was going on. If I had anything to pass down from the governor's office, I would do it at that time. The governor would have cabinet meetings, and the directors would be there. At least with me—I can't speak for the others—I think most of it came from Edgar to me to the directors, and back the other way. But anytime the director of a particular agency had a need to meet with the governor, he would certainly meet with them. He had an open door. Given his schedule, they'd have to work it in. It wasn't one of those things where Edgar would meet with him and I wouldn't be there. I would always be involved. We had a very back-and-forth relationship that way. It worked well, I thought.

DePue: Would it be more accurate to characterize the relationship as a liaison between the two, or as having more authority over—

Fleischli: No, I think I was their boss. I think they thought that they reported to me. I tried not to make it that way. I tried to make it as a back-and-forth, but I think the directors saw me as their immediate supervisor.

DePue: Did you have any role in helping the administration identify who would be the key players, the directors and the assistants?

Fleischli: Yeah. The governor had his own idea, and the governor had some of his own people. But yes, I was consulted. I think I interviewed everybody for the Department of Conservation. I interviewed some of the people for Transportation. I interviewed some of the people for Agriculture, also.

DePue: Actually, those are the three I've got listed down here. I wonder if you can talk us through the decision process where you ended up with the individuals you ended up with.

Fleischli: It was the governor's decision. How am I going to talk you through the decision process? We met with them. I'll take the Department of Natural Resources. The governor wanted someone who would be, for lack of a better term, a hook and bullet guy. In other words, the fisherman and hunters and so forth—who would be

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<sup>9</sup> Otto Kerner was convicted in February 1973, six years after resigning as Illinois governor, for accepting bribes, while governor, in the form of horse racetrack stock from Arlington Park manager Marge Everett. See Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, March 4, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 37-38, for Lawrence's assessment of Kerner.

acceptable to them. But he also wanted someone who had the credentials for the environmentalists and the green side of the Department of Natural Resources. A lot of people told me that was impossible to find. I knew Brent Manning. At the time, Brent Manning worked for Ducks Unlimited, I believe. He fit the category. His degrees and everything else fit the category. I was pushing him. There were some other people coming in. We talked to any number of people. Four, five, six people who were directors, and Manning emerged as the one. I was pushing Manning but wasn't sure I was going to get my way.<sup>10</sup>

I was also a very strong pusher of Kirk Brown, at the Department of Transportation. I thought he was the answer. And I say this in the right way: he was political enough to know that he had to deal with legislators and their districts and their roads, but he was also very, very professional. He was completely above board. He did nothing that was wrong. I had never known him to do anything that was even gray. And he knew how to build roads. He was a good engineer. I was a very strong pusher. Naturally, that's such a high-profile job, there were some other people from everywhere trying to get that job. I stayed in and pushed for Brown. Ultimately, Edgar made the decision that Brown was the guy. I think it was a very, very good decision.

Becky Doyle was at the Department of Agriculture. Becky ran for the House in her district down in the Taylorville area, down south of Springfield—I guess south and a little east of Springfield. I think the governor got to know her because he helped her out a little bit. When he was at the secretary of state's office, he came into some of these particular races and tried to help the Republicans win. I think the fact that she was female helped out. I think that was the first female Director of Agriculture. I'm not going to quote Edgar. He made some point that most of the family farms are really run by the female anyhow.

DePue: At least the books, oftentimes.

Fleischli: And I think he made reference to that. I didn't that have much input into that. I think Edgar kind of had that in his mind when he won, that she might be the right person. She turned out to be the director and did a good job.

DePue: Do you have a sense of the kinds of things Edgar was looking at when he was making these ultimate decisions about who would be his directors?

Fleischli: I think each particular agency has its own criteria. As I told you with Manning, he wanted somebody for the hook and bullets and also somebody for the environmental side. With Kirk Brown, we needed somebody who knew how to build roads. I think Edgar looked into all those things. We wanted to get away from the purely—and once again, I don't say this in any derogatory way—political appointment at the Department of Transportation. Edgar tried to put the right people in the right place. It was fine if they were Republican, it was fine if they

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<sup>10</sup> [Cite part of Manning interview where he talks about his hiring.]

were active Republicans, but they also had to know their job. That went all through his administration.

DePue: That's kind of what I was looking for. Since we're talking about that and we're in this area, Janis Cellini was his Director of Personnel, but typically would be referred to as patronage chief. Did you work closely with her?

Fleischli: I don't think she was a director of personnel. There was a director of personnel for Central Management Services. She was on the staff as—I don't know what her title was. There was a director of personnel at Central Management Services. Yeah, we all worked with Janis. Edgar always said we would try to hire our friends if they meet all the criteria, if they do the testing, if they do all the things that needed to be done, and if they could do the job. He would never put anyone in that couldn't do the job. So yeah, we all worked. I'll tell you the truth. I remember back at the secretary of state's office, when we first came in, the department that I took over had several Democratic county chairmen working in it. Several. I asked Edgar, "What do we do? We have Democratic county chairmen." He said, "If they do their job and show up for work everyday, don't do anything. Leave them there. Take care of them and everything. They may even like us and not work against us."<sup>11</sup> And it ended up that way. There were a lot of Democrats that really liked Edgar. He was very specific: "If they don't do their job, we'll get rid of them. But if they do their job, we're certainly not going to harass them because they're Democrats."

DePue: Did you have any that you had to take some actions against?

Fleischli: No. Absolutely not. I can't remember any prominent-type Democrat. Certainly we fired people for any number of reasons over ten years. I really can't remember a prominent Democrat that I had to discipline. They did their job.

DePue: You've done a very good job of laying out the structure of the administration and your particular role. I wanted just to give a little bit more background here and then we'll move on. An interesting time in American history: This is about the time of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and when he [Edgar] is just into office. But that wasn't necessarily Edgar's concern. He walked in and found out he had a huge budget deficit that he had to fill. As you already mentioned here, he'd run on a campaign talking about an extension of this income tax surcharge. That was a very contentious issue throughout the campaign. But now he's got to figure out how to balance the budget. Do you remember the discussions early in the administration when they discovered the scale of the hole they had to work with?

Fleischli: We knew there was a budget deficit during the campaign. Hartigan ran on cutting 1 percent or 2 percent. I remember him holding his fingers up. And that was it. We were going to be fine.

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<sup>11</sup> See Jim Edgar, June 15, 2009, 24-26 and Carter Hendren, April 28, 2009, 26; both interviewed by Mark DePue. Also see Stephen Schnorf, interview by Mike Czaplicki (get rest of cite after edited). All interviews part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL.

DePue: Two percent, I think it was.

Fleischli: We were elected in November, and in December we started looking at budgets and things like that. We'd cut the budget by Christmas of that year, once. Came back in and found out that there were bigger holes. I think we made three budgets by January fifteenth or February first. How we discovered it? I think we knew it all along. We didn't know how severe it was until we got in and looked at the different agencies. But we handled it. Joan Walters was marvelous. She was the boss.

DePue: Joan Walters being the Budget Director?

Fleischli: Correct.

DePue: Why was she so adept at doing this job?

Fleischli: She was a great administrator. I can't say, because I don't have the expertise. I don't know how good she was as far as numbers and accounting, but she was a great administrator. Hard worker. Had her nose to the grindstone. Nobody would outwork her.<sup>12</sup>

DePue: It had to be one of the more—I want to say unpopular, but—certainly it's the kind of thing that's a lightning rod, because she was the one who was acting in the governor's behalf and telling people "No" all the time, I would suspect, or, "You've got to cut more."

Fleischli: Yes. We all did that. She would tell me and I would go back to my agencies. We closed parks. There was a lot of hassle about closing the parks. We closed parks.

DePue: Of the big agencies you had, I would think the Department of Transportation—would that be the one that had the largest budget?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: Department of Conservation.

Fleischli: Conservation and Ag were probably close. I forget the numbers right now, but they were probably close in their budget.

DePue: Where were the places with budget cuts that were most painful to deal with—and the kind of changes that you had to impose?

Fleischli: Any time you have to lay people off, that's always the hardest. When you have to look at laying people off, it's terrible. It's not something you want to do. Even if the guy was a bad employee, I hated firing him. (laughs) You're cutting the life

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<sup>12</sup> Others share Fleischli's view of Walters's work ethic. See Howard Peters, interview by Mark DePue, January 21, 2010, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 36.

line off, so that's the hardest. We had to cut services. We had to cut maintenance. We were cutting with sickles and scythes instead of mowers in some of the parks, when we didn't have money for equipment. We cut back on vehicle usage, which is tough in both of those departments, Ag and Conservation. We cut phones. Everywhere you could save a dime, we looked at saving a dime. So what was the hardest? I don't know. It was all hard.

DePue: And there were serious cutbacks in staff?

Fleischli: Oh yeah.

DePue: Any particular agency that really got hurt?

Fleischli: I think all of them got hit the same way. As you know, Transportation has more federal funding. There were some areas that we didn't have to worry about in Transportation, but there were other areas funded by general revenue funds that were big trouble.<sup>13</sup> Natural Resources had some federal funds, and Ag had some federal funds, but not like Transportation.

DePue: The budget crisis went on, not for just a few months, but for about two years practically, didn't it?

Fleischli: Actually, I stayed with Edgar for a little over four years, and I didn't feel we were out of it in four years. We saw the light at the end of the tunnel and it wasn't a train coming at us, but we did see the light at the end of the tunnel. I think it was well into his second administration when things really ... That's my opinion. I don't know whether he'd back it up or not, but I felt, probably two years into the administration, that we'd kind of turned a corner where we brought some things back on line, we got some more money. Things were moving in the right direction. But it was still a problem. I'll add to that. I think the governor realized that we didn't get into this mess in a year, and we were not going to get out of it in a year. We did all we could to stop-gap and so forth. I don't remember him telling me this, but I think the projections of he and Joan and the rest of us were, it was going to take three or four or five years, to come back—but we were going to always move in the right direction.

DePue: I know that first-year budget battle was especially tough. But January of '92, I believe, was probably the low point for the state's economy in terms of unemployment, and obviously unemployment equates to income for the state, in terms of taxes. That was the toughest; but as you mentioned, it didn't get easy overnight.

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<sup>13</sup> For more detail on why Edgar didn't have to worry as much about the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) budget, see Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 98-100.

Fleischli: No. And there were times when (laughs) we didn't know if we had enough in the bank to meet dailies. We were broke. I mean, we were absolutely broke. It was a daily thing. Joan handled it well.

DePue: What I'd like to do next is go through some of the key players in the Edgar administration and get your reflections on who they were and how they integrated with the overall team. Let's start with Mike Lawrence.

Fleischli: Very close to Edgar.

DePue: He was the Director of Communications?

Fleischli: Correct.

DePue: Press secretary, plus?

Fleischli: Yes. He was probably Edgar's chief advisor.

DePue: What was it about Mike that Edgar trusted so much, do you know?

Fleischli: If you know Mike—Mike would not lie to you if he had a gun to his head. Mike was very straightforward. He was on top of things. Had a great sense, from being around, what was the right thing to do. His integrity was not questioned, ever. He and Edgar got along. I got along with him very well. I trusted him. I think Mike would tell you that he and I were very close friends.

DePue: This next one is currently running for governor: Edgar's first chief of staff, Kirk Dillard. Did you have a relationship with him or did you oftentimes go through him to get to the governor? How did that work?

Fleischli: Both. I went through him to get to the governor and we had a close relationship. It was Kirk who talked to me. Edgar and I were flying someplace. Before he was sworn in, right after the election, we went to a governor's meeting or something. I forget what it was now. Dillard went with us. Dillard talked to me at that time about being the executive assistant. They didn't have a title for it, but he laid out what it was and asked me if I wanted to do something like that. I said, "Yeah. I would love to." I think at the time, he thought that he was going to be one of those, also. I'm not sure of that, but he ended up being chief of staff.

DePue: Do you recall some of the others that started as executive Assistants with you?

Fleischli: Belletire, Mike Belletire. I'm drawing a blank here.

DePue: I think Al Grosboll—

Fleischli: Oh yeah, Al. Help me out.

DePue: Was Steve Schnorf, at that time?

Fleischli: No, Steve Schnorf was the head of Central Management Services.

DePue: How about Sally Jackson?

Fleischli: No, I think Sally...did she do the lottery? I can't remember. God, that was a name I forgot.

DePue: The lottery was Desirée Rogers, who's working for Obama right now.

Fleischli: That's true. I guess Sally was in the original cabinet.

DePue: Yeah, she was listed as a deputy chief of staff. And I know that was a term he used for his—

Fleischli: His second administration.

DePue: —second administration. What did you think of Al?

Fleischli: Al and I were close. Some of our agencies overlapped each other. We worked at the secretary of state's office together, so it was a natural thing. We got along well, I think. We still do.

DePue: The people who were working the legislative liaison piece—and here's a piece that Edgar had come up through; he understood that position very well, so he understood how important it was—were Steve Selcke and especially, over time, Mark Boozell. Did you have a good relationship with them?

Fleischli: Yep. Both of them. I still see them. They're still around the Capitol. We talk and kid. We got along fine. I didn't do a lot of work with the legislature. I worked with those guys, and then they worked with the legislature. We didn't do a lot of freelancing on our own.

DePue: If there was an issue that involved the Department of Transportation or the Department of Conservation, would it be more likely that the directors would go up and testify in the legislature, versus yourself?

Fleischli: Absolutely, yes.

DePue: So it would be Boozell and the directors who would do that?

Fleischli: Absolutely. Yes.

DePue: Legal counsel. Arnie Kanter was the initial one.

Fleischli: His office was right next to mine, yeah. I still see him, too. He was around a lot. I knew Arnie a little bit from the campaign, and then I got to know him a lot better afterwards. He's a nice guy.

DePue: How about the lieutenant governor, Bob Kustra?

Fleischli: I think the world about him. Somehow, we became very close. It was one of those things. I didn't know him a lot before he ran, but we became close. I miss seeing him, to be honest with you. He's a very good guy.

DePue: He's out in Idaho now. You said that in a way that you were kind of surprised that you should become close with the lieutenant governor.

Fleischli: Yeah. No matter what they say, they're two distinct offices. In my limited knowledge of other administrations, Edgar probably included the lieutenant governor more than most of the others did. But it was still one of those things. They were separate offices. I can't say nice enough things about Bob Kustra. He helped us out a lot.

DePue: You're reflecting one of the curiosities of the Illinois state constitution and how it has those two positions established. And I can't leave this name out of it: Brenda Edgar. Did you have a chance to work with Brenda?

Fleischli: Oh yeah. I don't want to sound like I'm Edgar's greatest friend, but when Edgar had a leak in his pipe, I'd go fix the leak in his pipe. He'd call me.

DePue: Over in the mansion?

Fleischli: No. In his house. (laughs) The mansion was taken care of, but this was at his house. Brenda and I worked very well together. She's a wonderful lady. Fantastic lady. I don't know what else I can say about her. She's a good lady.

DePue: You've already talked about this person quite a bit, but any other reflections on Joan Walters, his budget director?

Fleischli: Nobody ever outworked her. She's very fair, stern. Don't get her on your wrong side because she'll "getcha." I don't know whether Edgar was good or lucky, but he put a lot of good people around him. Excellent people around him. I guess I include myself in that, but I don't mean that blowing my own horn. I'm talking about the other people. They were excellent, excellent people, and he inspired a lot of loyalty from them.

DePue: You're obviously proud to be part of that team.

Fleischli: Sure.

DePue: Anybody else that I probably should have mentioned and neglected to mention here?

Fleischli: Belletire, Mike Belletire. I can't think of her name. I mentioned it the other day. She's a young African-American attorney. I think she went to Harvard or Yale. My



god, I can't remember. She was very good. She was the executive assistant that took care of the Social Services end of things.<sup>14</sup>

DePue: Let me pause here real quickly and maybe we can help each other out in that.

Fleischli: She took care of the social services agency.

(short pause)

DePue: We didn't have too much success finding the name. We'll get that in the transcript. What was her role again?

Fleischli: She took care of social service agencies. Public Aid. Public Health in those days. Children and Family Services. She was the EA that oversaw those agencies.

DePue: Which is another area that, if you don't do well, brings in all kinds of negative publicity, so obviously an important position.

Fleischli: I was talking to Edgar about it before he was sworn in. Somebody else kind of echoed what I said. I thought the two most important things we had to get a handle on right away were Children and Family Services and Emergency Response, whatever they called that. If we had a tornado... Hopefully, that is never, ever called on, but if it is, you better be ready. So I told him those are the first two things that I would look at. God forbid that some child is hurt on your watch, and you're blamed for it. So I said, "Those are the two things you ought to look at right away."

DePue: Very prescient, because we're going to talk a little bit later about the flood of '93. That was his emergency to deal with. Before we get to that point, though—and maybe you were not involved with this directly—Edgar's decision in November of 1991 to close Dickson Mounds Museum, where they had all the Indian skeletons, Indian relics, in that location.<sup>15</sup>

Fleischli: It was actually Al Grosboll's thing, but I was brought in to talk to them about it. I agreed with it 100 percent.

DePue: What was the political issue involved with that?

Fleischli: (laughs) Exposing the bones. I don't understand your question. It was obvious what the problem was. They had unearthed a burial mound. The Native Americans thought that was terrible and I agreed with them. I think Edgar found the solution: he made it an interpretive center. I don't know whether you've been there before or after, but it's a lot better now than it was before.

DePue: And defuse that issue in a way that was amenable to both sides.

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<sup>14</sup> Felicia Norwood.

<sup>15</sup> AL Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, July 23, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, ALPL, 60-66.

Fleischli: Absolutely.

DePue: January '92, we'd already talked about. He had some more serious budget cuts in the '92 budget itself, right in the middle of the fiscal year. I'm sure that was hard. Jumping ahead a year, in June of 1993—I would think this is certainly in your purview—Site M was added to the list of properties that the state now would have to manage.

Fleischli: Brent Manning will tell you the same thing. I was probably the one who pushed for that harder than anything. I think we were forty-eighth in the country on public lands. Of all the states, I think we were forty-eighth. So one of our goals of conservation was to buy some land—not necessarily to hunt on or anything like that, but just parks, recreation, open land, and so forth. When you refer to Site M, it had been available for many years. We worked out a way. We worked with the local people, where their property taxes wouldn't be affected—because there's a payment that you make to them in lieu of property taxes. We worked it out with the farming where we could damn-near pay for it with farm land, and got the deal done. I still have the pen in my office that the purchase was signed with.

DePue: Sixteen thousand, five hundred-plus acres of land right next to the Illinois River near Beardstown, is it not?

Fleischli: It's near Virginia. It takes in a big area there. It's not real close to Beardstown. It's an old testing ground. Brent Manning told me that some of the ground is almost virgin ground. The ground was pushed ahead by the...

DePue: Glacier?

Fleischli: Yeah, glaciers. I couldn't think of the word. Glacier movement. Some of the stuff that moved ahead is still there. It's very unique. Manning set up—with a lot of help, I was a hundred percent for it—a program for the hunting end of it. There's an area that's dedicated to improving the habitat for quail and pheasants, deer, and so forth. It's becoming a **magnet** for out-of-state deer hunters. They named it after Edgar, so it was one of the more important—it's now the Jim Edgar Fish and Wildlife Area, I think.<sup>16</sup>

DePue: Sometimes referred to also as Panther Creek?

Fleischli: Panther Creek was the stuff that was right next door to it. There's an area we owned before, Panther Creek area. That's where that comes from.

DePue: You alluded to it a little bit, but I was wondering if you could explain why you were such an advocate for acquiring this land.

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<sup>16</sup> Site M became the Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish & Wildlife Area. Also see Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, October 22, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, 71-79, for his recollections about the acquisition of Site M and Edgar's commitment to preservation more generally.

Fleischli: First of all, to find sixteen thousand acres together anywhere in Illinois is unbelievable. Where you could find it under one ownership, where you wouldn't have to go to any number of families' trusts and so forth to buy it. It was in the middle of the state. And as I said, we were forty-eighth. We were second from the bottom in public lands, so I thought we needed it. We went in and showed Edgar how affordable it was, how we could do it without taxing the state—because we were still in money problems at the time. Brent Manning put together an elaborate presentation with slides and charts and graphs and everything. We talked to Edgar about it and he said, "Sounds like a good deal. Let's do it." We didn't even have to use any of them. (laughs)

DePue: I think you know that the next interview I have is with Brent Manning, so I'm sure I'll hear more about it. But it's important to hear your perspective on it, as well.

Fleischli: Edgar was into trail riding. We have equestrian trails there. Not because he was into it, we just did it. That was one of his favorite places. He'd go out and ride horses and hike and take his dogs there. It ended up being one of his favorite places when he was around.

DePue: Did you know, when you first started working for him, that he had such an interest in all of these kinds of activities?

Fleischli: I can't say that I did. It was obvious within the first week. (laughter)

DePue: That gets us up to the flood of '93. By June, it was getting a little moist.

Fleischli: No, it was July. Right after the Fourth of July.

DePue: That the flooding started to occur?

Fleischli: Big rains came, and I remember we had a meeting. Edgar put me in the field to... I was the guy that went out with Kirk Brown, and we started to try to bring things back. I remember we had the meeting and he said, "You're going to be the guy in the field. Get going." I said, "Fine." I went back and was sitting in my office about a half hour later, twenty minutes, just getting things ready. He walked back to my office and said, "Haven't you left yet?" "Nope, but I'm on my way!" (laughter) Kirk Brown and I were on it everyday. We were gone forever. Al Grosboll took over after, on the rehab of it. When the flooding was actually over and we were doing some other things—the properties, Al took over after that.

DePue: From what you said, it sounds like he [Edgar] thought that the Department of Transportation should be in the lead and fighting this. Would that be right?

Fleischli: Because of the bridges that were involved, and so forth. It was a natural thing. The roads that we were going to have to close. It was a natural thing.<sup>17</sup>

DePue: Did you work closely with all the various communities who were crying out for state assistance?

Fleischli: That's what my job was, to go meet with them and see what their problems were. See how we could help them. Coordinate the National Guard, coordinate the volunteers—do all that stuff. That was my job.

DePue: Did you find this to be one of the most significant challenges during the time you served?

Fleischli: Very challenging. Without Kirk Brown, the state would have been in big trouble. Kirk Brown—and I guess I did—made some decisions right on the spot that had to be made; that if you worried about going through the bureaucracy and so forth, homes and towns and people would have been lost.

DePue: Did you feel like the governor had your back? That you guys could make those decisions?

Fleischli: Absolutely, 100 percent. We would talk to him every day and we'd let him know what was going on, what we'd done. You'd check back. He was there. He was everywhere. The helicopter. He flew in. Hell, I think he was calling the prisoners by first names.<sup>18</sup> (laughter) He was there. He was involved in it.

DePue: Do you recall any particular examples of the kinds of decisions you and Brown might have had to make, or the situations you encountered?

Fleischli: Cut a road in Grafton. We just did it. The state owned the property. I think the road is still there today. I forget the highway number, but it was under six feet of water. Nobody could get through. In the latter part of July, Calhoun County has a big peach [harvest]—it's a big part of their economy, and they couldn't get them out. So we cut a road and got them out.

DePue: Calhoun County, geographically, is one of the more peculiar ones because it's got the Illinois River on one side and the Mississippi on the other, and there's not a whole lot of ways to get there.

Fleischli: They were under water. Three quarters of it, I think, was under water at the time. It was bad.

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<sup>17</sup> See Kirk Brown interview, 77, for Brown's explanation of why IDOT plays such a large role in the state's disaster response.

<sup>18</sup> As part of the state's massive flood relief mobilization, Governor Edgar authorized the use of prison labor. On the organization of that effort and the support it attracted from flood-stricken communities, see Howard Peters, January 21, 1010, 4-6, and Al Grosboll, October 22, 2009, 6 and 23.

DePue: I think you've already addressed this one to a certain respect, but do you think that the governor was decisive enough in handling that situation?

Fleischli: Absolutely. I don't think history gives him enough credit for what he did during that. I'll be very honest with you. You can talk to Brown and the rest of them, but I think Edgar was—if he would've hesitated on a lot of things, there would have been a lot more damage than was done.

DePue: Were you working at all with the National Guard during that time?

Fleischli: Yeah. They were doing their own thing and we were doing ours, but we'd always meet and talk: what was going on, where we were, working with Corrections with the prisoners. The prisoners helped tremendously. We couldn't have done it without them sandbagging.

DePue: Anything else we want to say about the flood?

Fleischli: I remember, I think it was Manning and I—Edgar was coming in to meet us, (laughs) and we were on one side of the river and Edgar was flying in. The only place to land the helicopter was on the other side, so we got one of Manning's chief officers, and he had the boat and was taking us across. Right in the middle of the river, the boat kicked out and the helicopter was going over the top. (laughter) We thought we were going to end up in New Orleans. The motor quit right in the middle of the Illinois River, I think. You know what that was like. There were logs and everything else coming down. (laughs) Oh, boy. We watched the helicopter—"Here it comes." I forget—somebody came out and got us. We got out of it somehow.

DePue: Those are the kinds of things that stay with you, though, don't they? Shortly after that, you guys were also beginning the discussion on reorganization of the department that became the Department of Natural Resources?

Fleischli: Yeah, that started probably a couple years into Edgar's administration; Manning and I talked about it. I don't know whose idea it was first, probably Brent's. It was logical for some of the things. Some of it was Edgar's, too. I think he told us, as the executive assistants, to look for things like that. I probably talked about it, came back, and Edgar said, "Pursue it." I can't remember the whole thing. Yeah, it was in total discussion. I still have, somewhere in my files, Brent's original idea of how to do it, that I worked with him on. It's very close to what it is now today.

DePue: What was the basic rationale for doing the reorganization?

Fleischli: Save money. Coordinate things better. Sometimes government gets silly. Water resources and so forth, they need to be... Mines and Minerals is a prime example of a natural resource. We worked with them all the time on different things. Why shouldn't they be in the same department, where you have to walk down a hall instead of worrying about going across town or somewhere else. It was economy. It's a better way to run government. Edgar always told us to look for that.

DePue: But one of the agencies that wasn't included was the Environmental Protection Agency.

Fleischli: I forget why. There was a reason for that. I think they had to oversee some of the things we did. As Natural Resources, or Department of Conservation, we thought that would be too close. There was a reason why, and I can't remember. Brent may remember that.

DePue: We've got a little bit more to go here. Not too much, but I know that you said that you needed to make a phone call.

Fleischli: Yeah, I've got about ten or fifteen minutes.

DePue: So why don't we just take a short break, and then we can finish up right before lunch, if that sounds good for you. Yeah, exactly.

(pause in recording)

We took a very short break for the phone call, and we're getting up to 1994. Obviously that's an election year for the governor. Did you get involved with that election at all?

Fleischli: Yeah, I was involved. Probably not as much as the first one, but I was involved, yes.

DePue: In what way?

Fleischli: Whatever way they needed me. I had four years of experience in the governor's office, and so was with Mike Belletire there, doing some issues. We would help on issues and things like that. I'd put up signs or I'd work on issues. It didn't make any difference—whatever was needed.

DePue: Same terms, in terms of how the governor was instructing people in the administration to work on the election campaign?

Fleischli: Even more so. I think it was hammered home almost every day. Don't embarrass yourself or the governor.

DePue: About the middle of that campaign, July of 1994, the governor had a serious incident with his heart. Ended up getting a quadruple bypass surgery, I believe. What were your thoughts when you heard about that?

Fleischli: At first, I was glad that he made it. (both chuckle) I was glad that he was alive. Secondly, I was very concerned for him and his future, but I talked to Brenda and she told me things went well. They thought everything was moving in the right direction. All you can do is hope and pray that everything turned out all right. I remember one thing you haven't hit on. Very early, when he was at the secretary

of state's office, the plane went down. Did you know that? They had a plane crash.<sup>19</sup>

DePue: That he was involved with?

Fleischli: Yeah, he and Brenda were in the plane.

DePue: I don't think I've heard that.

Fleischli: I forget all the details of it now. But same thing. When I heard that—"Holy God, I hope he made it." Not because he was my meal ticket; it was because he was a great guy and a friend that you were concerned for. Yeah, there was a plane crash. It wasn't a huge crash, but it was scary.

DePue: When you're not landing at an airport, and I assume... It sounds like he wasn't landing at an airport.

Fleischli: Can't remember the whole details of it, to be honest with you right now.

DePue: I'll have to go back and ask somebody.

Fleischli: You could probably ask him about that. (laughs) He'd probably remember it better than anybody.

DePue: Or maybe Brenda, even.

Fleischli: But going back to Bob Kustra, that's where I really respected Bob Kustra. He had resigned; he had gone on and had his own talk show in Chicago, on Chicago radio.<sup>20</sup> Very bright future. Things could open for him. He knew that the state needed him and Edgar needed him, and he came back. I really respect him for that.

DePue: A different kind of election campaign, though, than I think he had in 1990. Dawn Clark Netsch was a formidable candidate, but it wasn't nearly as tight a campaign as it had been in 1990. Was the mood different?

Fleischli: In my opinion, Dawn was a very, **very** formidable candidate. But I think Edgar's record was there. We were coming out of some bad times. He kind of hit her early and took her out early. Summer—August—we were running ads and so forth. That was his decision. I think it was a very astute political decision. He kind of cut the

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<sup>19</sup> On August 16, 1981, Jim and Brenda Edgar were traveling with Ken Zehnder to a fundraiser in Moline for State Rep. Ben Polk (R-Moline). When the plane's landing gear would not retract shortly after takeoff from Springfield, controllers ordered the plane to return. It did so, and the still-stuck gear collapsed on touchdown, sending the plane skidding off the runway. *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1981. This would not be the last time Jim Edgar encountered bad luck on a flight; see Kirk Brown interview, 111-17.

<sup>20</sup> Lieutenant Governor Kustra resigned his post June 28 and announced he would start work August 1 as an afternoon talk show host on WLS-AM 890. On July 18, Kustra reversed course and announced he would remain lieutenant governor. *Chicago Tribune*, June 29 & July 18, 1994.

legs out from under her campaign early. She was trying to catch up all the time, and we won.

DePue: That was an interesting election year. It was an off year, as far as the presidential election was concerned, but it's also the Republican triumph of 1994. At the state level, that meant, for the first time ever—and for only two years—Edgar had a Republican House and a Republican Senate. Did that make much difference in terms of what he was able to do with his administration the next couple of years?

Fleischli: I don't know. I have an opinion that it was probably harder. (laughter)

DePue: Perhaps we should just leave it at that?

Fleischli: Everybody was important, then. (laughs)

DePue: I think this was also about the time that you had some important decisions to make in your own life, as well. What was your intention for that second administration for Edgar?

Fleischli: I didn't know whether I wanted to stay in the governor's office or not, but Edgar talked to me. There were several opportunities to stay where I was or to move into an agency. I was kind of burned out from being an executive assistant for four years. It was one of those things that you didn't have a day off. I don't mean that to brag or for somebody to feel sorry for me. I knew what I was getting into when I got it. I can't remember three days in a row that I was not in an office. And that's weekends and everything. It was a very demanding job, so I was kind of burnt out on it. I was looking around to see what else was going to happen in the world. I had an opportunity to go with the Bidwell family and Sportsman's Park in Chicago, in the horse racing industry—which I loved—and did it.

DePue: You said the governor was talking to you about some other opportunities?

Fleischli: I had other opportunities. I could have stayed where I was. I talked to Edgar and he said, basically, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'm looking at some things outside." He said, "Fine." I said, "If not, I probably want to get out of the governor's office." He said, "Fine. We'll find something for you at the time." I think Reilly came in about that time, didn't he?

DePue: Yeah, Jim Reilly became the chief of staff. Well, Jim Reilly was the chief of staff during the election year, and then Gene Reineke took over after that.

Fleischli: Reilly stayed in about a year, I think. A year and a half.

DePue: And that was primarily during that election year, to do the transition. That was when Dillard was running for state Senate. Do you recall any of the other positions that came up in the discussions?



Fleischli: I could have been in Natural Resources if Manning was going to leave, or I could have gone in there as an assistant or something like that. Probably the number one was Capital Development Board. Ended up that when I did leave, Edgar asked me to become chairman of the board, instead of executive director, which I did.

DePue: Obviously, your decision at the time: to move on and do something different?

Fleischli: Yeah, it was. Anytime you're in an administration, you don't want to be the guy who shuts the lights out. If you're going to move, you might as well start early—this is my opinion, anyhow—look around and see what's available to you.

DePue: That's certainly the natural time to be making changes, on both sides of the equation.

Fleischli: And honestly, I was burned out. It was tough.

DePue: Sportsman's Park is in Chicago, correct?

Fleischli: Cicero.

DePue: Cicero. Did that mean a move for you and the family?

Fleischli: No. I did legislative stuff and so forth. I stayed here.

DePue: Were you essentially something of a lobbyist?

Fleischli: I lobbied for them. Whatever they wanted me to do, I did. I did some community stuff. I did some other things. Since then, they also had an interest in the riverboat in East St. Louis, so I migrated into that; I had some contacts through the Edgar administration in the Metro-East area, so I used those.<sup>21</sup> One of those things.

DePue: How long did you stay with that organization?

Fleischli: I'm still with them. Sportsman's Park is closed, the race track. But I'm doing stuff with the riverboat for them now.

DePue: What is the official name of the organization that you're with now?

Fleischli: I'm with myself. I'm Fleischli and Associates, or Fleischli. (laughs) But I work for them. I have three clients. I have them as number one; I have a small community college in southern Illinois; and I have Illinois Federation for Outdoor Resources, which is an outdoor group. Those are the three people, but number one is the riverboat in East St. Louis.

DePue: That keeps you more than busy.

Fleischli: Absolutely.

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<sup>21</sup> Metro-East is the region composed of the suburbs lying east of St. Louis, in Illinois.

DePue: And very much connected with the state government, as well?

Fleischli: Yes.

DePue: In other words, you've had a position, now, where you can observe Edgar's successors. First, George Ryan, then Blagojevich. We won't get too much farther than that, but I wonder if you would be willing to reflect on either of those gentlemen as governors in comparison to Jim Edgar.

Fleischli: It's hard for me to do because I'm on the outside looking in. I have some biased opinions, because they may have said no to something I want or yes to something I want, so it's very difficult for me to say that. I will go on record as saying I thought George Ryan did some good things for the state of Illinois. On the criminal charges and so forth, I have no opinion or no comment. My opinion is that he's suffered enough; he ought to be out of jail. But that's just one man's opinion. (laughs) Blagojevich, I thought, was a disaster from day one. Sounds very partisan and honestly it isn't. I thought he was a disaster. It was obvious what was going on, from day one, to jobs and who got this and who got that. I just thought he was a disaster.

DePue: Now, you say "those kind of decisions." We talked a lot about how Governor Edgar, with your assistance, was making some important decisions about staffing the government. You're saying that Edgar's approach and Blagojevich's approach were completely different in that respect?

Fleischli: Absolutely I'm saying that. Blagojevich's was how much you gave him or how much... I have no proof of this and I'm probably liable for saying it, but from my opinion, it didn't make any difference what your qualifications were. It was just how much money you could raise or how much you did raise or how much you promised to raise. It was the direct opposite with Edgar: it was how well you did your job, first. And you better do your job or you wouldn't be there long. (laughs)

DePue: This is probably the natural place, then, to get to sum up questions for you. We talked a lot about your view of Edgar, but any final assessment of Edgar the politician, Edgar the governor, Edgar the man?

Fleischli: I don't know who said it, but there's some quote that, "Good politics is good government if you run a government right." Edgar always referred to it that way. "If we do things right here, we'll be perceived as doing the right thing, and we'll be reelected." That was number one in the secretary of state's office. We did everything humanly possible to do the right thing, to make the lines shorter in Chicago. Downstater—we don't realize what it is to get your license renewed in Chicago. It's a hassle. It's a half-day job or more. It's long lines. We did everything we could to change that. Even when Edgar came in at the secretary of state's office and laid-off the elevator operators in the automatic elevators. That made big headlines, that he did that. But in an automatic elevator, why do you have an elevator operator? But we didn't fire them. We found a place for all of

them. I think every one of them had a job somewhere, doing something. So that's the kind of guy he was. He did the right thing, but he was very human at the same time. He didn't put people on the street. I forgot your question now.

DePue: That very much answers the question. You spent something like fourteen or fifteen years working with Edgar, first at secretary of state, and then the four years with him as governor. Looking back on those years, what accomplishment, which you were involved with personally, would you say you're most proud of?

Fleischli: Naturally, at the secretary of state's office, the work we did on the Capitol. Today, people still talk about it. They still point up at the top and see the stained glass. The exterior of the Capitol is probably due for another rehab pretty soon. We redid the statues and things like that. So that's probably my—and the cleanliness that Edgar wanted and we demanded from our people. How clean the buildings were and so forth. I've always been very proud of that. At the governor's office, I think just making it through a very, very tough time. Getting to the point where we didn't go deeper in debt. We started to climb out of it almost immediately, which I think people in office now could look at and see. (laughs) You can't spend your way out of debt. (laughter) You have to cut your way out of debt. That, and the work we did on the floods. The work we did with making the Department of Conservation, the Department of Natural Resources. All those things. We went through a long time in government office without a scandal. My integrity... I think I have a pretty good reputation, as far as that goes. I'm proud of all that.

DePue: Any particular disappointments that you reflect back on?

Fleischli: To be honest with you, no. No. I mean, there are probably some things. I wish we would've done more at Conservation with the upland game season. We could have looked at the out-of-state deer hunting fiasco that's coming up. Those are just little things. They're disappointments, but they're not that major. Very proud of the time I was with Edgar, to be honest with you.

DePue: Any closing comments for us, then?

Fleischli: No, I don't believe so.

DePue: George, it's been a real pleasure to talk to you and learn more about what the Edgar administration was like from your eyes. You were in very important positions—not just his governorship, but in those crucial years in the secretary of state's office as well. I thank you for allowing us to talk to you and add to the historical record.

Fleischli: Not a problem.

(end of interview)