Interview with Frederick C. Smith
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Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

DePue: Good afternoon. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today, I'm excited to have with me right to my left here, Fred Smith. Good afternoon, Fred.

Smith: Good afternoon.

DePue: We're going to be talking to Fred about his experiences going and visiting every single presidential library and museum throughout the United States. Let me start by saying today is April 2, Friday, it is actually Good Friday, and Fred you mentioned that it's not just Good Friday, but it's your anniversary as well.

Smith: That is good; yes, it is our anniversary.

DePue: Tell me when and where you were born. That's how we like to start these.

Smith: I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in March 1947, sixty-three years ago.

DePue: Okay. And can we get a little bit of a very brief thumbnail of what you have been doing here for the last thirty years of your life.

Smith: Okay. Following college, when I graduated from Becknell University, the draft was still in effect, which was during the Viet Nam War and so, while there were other things that I may have wanted to have done at that period of

my life, I really didn't have a choice. However, going into the military proved to be the most valuable experience that I probably have had to this day. I went to naval officer's training at Newport, Rhode Island in 1969, and then I served in the Navy for four years. That opened my eyes to a lot of things in the world, things that I honestly didn't know existed having been brought up here in the United States and leading a somewhat sheltered life, I suppose. But after my experience in the military, I then went and got a graduate degree in international relations at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and that then led me to Washington, DC, where I was fortunate to get a job in 1978 with the Department of Defense. I spent the next twenty-six years as a career civil servant serving in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, working in international security affairs. I retired from government in late 2004 and ran a company for a couple of years, and most recently, I helped run an energy institute at the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. Energy is a huge issue these days. It is critically important and part of our national security, as well. So, virtually all of my adult career was spent in the government in Washington,

DC.

DePue: What was your title you had when you retired in 2004?

Smith: I really didn't have a title then, but the best title I had in the government, the best job, was Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. (DePue laughs) It was a title about this long and, as somebody once remarked to me, the length of your title is directly inversely related to your importance. In other words, if you have a title like President or even Secretary of Defense, you're far more important than somebody with a title as long as mine was. It was an incredible position. I was fortunate as a career civil servant to have been given that opportunity and was in that job for five years and oversaw our defense relations all over the world. This was during the late 1990s when a lot of our defense relationships in the post-Cold War era were just really beginning with a lot of countries.

DePue: In other words, in your career, you've seen and been involved with a lot of history, a lot of America's history.

Smith: Well, I'm not that old, Mark, (DePue laughs) but I started in the Carter administration when I moved to Washington in 1978, so I served from the Carter administration up through the George W. Bush, that was '43, administration. And so I started in late 70s, early 80s, Reagan, when the Cold War was in effect and right through, I was heavily involved in both Gulf Wars and at the Pentagon. So yes, I did see a lot of history. I worked in an area of the government that is usually called the National Security Arena and the Inter-Agency Arena that involves the Department of Defense, Department of State, all of the intelligence community, as well as some of the other departments, like Treasury and Energy and the National Security Council staff of the White House. So that was my involvement and direct participation with

these government agencies under different presidential administrations, how each administration operated, what the processes were and all that. It is what led me to this interest in the presidents and presidential libraries.

DePue: Well, that's a great transition. As much as I'd like to talk to you about all these other experiences which you've obviously had for the last couple of decades, tell me why you embarked on this process of going and visiting every single presidential library and museum.

Smith: Okay. There's a strong personal nature to all this. A little over a year ago, I was diagnosed with cancer, something that really hits you in the stomach when you get this news and you don't know what the rest of life will bring. I and my family were dealing with it. I'm under treatment up until this day and well into the future, I hope. But not quite a year ago, it was actually about six or seven months ago, last fall one of my close friends—I suppose I should also say one of my sensitive close friends—asked me, "Fred, what's on your bucket list?" So I thought a little bit and given the government career that I just described and interest in national security and Presidents and how they operate and all, I said, "I would like to visit as many of the presidential libraries as possible."

When I made that statement, honestly, I didn't even know how many there were. I knew they existed because I had very briefly in my life, visited two of them: at Hyde Park, the FDR Library and Museum; and once up in Boston, when I was at the Pentagon, went to the Kennedy Library. But the Kennedy Library was not to visit the museum or Library itself, but was really for a dinner one evening there. So I knew they existed and I had also read more recently about the dedication of several libraries, most recently the dedication of the Clinton Library in 2004 down in Little Rock. So I knew they existed, but I didn't know how many or to what extent or even where most of them were, or where they are located. So I started going research on that and what I found is that there are twelve sort of official presidential libraries. The thirteenth will be George W. Bush's when it opens in Dallas in 2013.

But there are twelve today that, in the sense of administration of these libraries, they're run by a combination of either a foundation that's established by the former president, or his family and friends. The foundation raises the money to build the library and then the National Archives and Records Administration, NARA, which is the National Archives in Washington, D. C., which many people are familiar with, they actually run the operations and maintenance of the twelve libraries. The operations and maintenance is paid for by a line item in the U. S. budget. Last year it cost about sixty-five million dollars to run these twelve libraries.

Then there are six other sort of unofficial libraries that are listed, and here's where I think it gets a little bit fuzzy. You have these six libraries,

which includes the Lincoln Library and Museum here in Springfield, Illinois; also, the Wilson Museum in Staunton, Virginia; the Coolidge; Rutherford B. Hayes; John Adams up in Massachusetts; and one or two others that they list as unofficial, which are run by private foundations or by state government, such as the government of Illinois. So they are not part of the official library system that's run by the National Archives and Records Administration. But there are also, as many people know, other places, like Mt. Vernon, near my home in Virginia. Mt. Vernon, which used to be pretty much just the house at Mt. Vernon. But in the past several years they've added a tremendous museum and theater with some videos and movies and things, which seem to me, they don't have any papers or documents that I'm aware of there. But there's Mt. Vernon. There's also Monticello, Thomas Jefferson, and I think two or three others of presidential sites around the country.

DePue: One of them is up in Galena, Illinois, for Grant, Ulysses Grant.

Smith: True. I don't know how they differentiate between something like Mt. Vernon and the Lincoln Library and Museum here.

DePue: But the project for your bucket list was specifically just the ones for NARA and this one?

Smith: Well, I narrowed it down to the twelve existing NARA-run museums. I hope I make it to the thirteenth. In the process of travelling around and talking to people about this, and I've done further research and all, I heard nothing but—really, I'm not just blowing smoke here, Mark (DePue chuckles)—but I heard nothing but great comments about the Lincoln museum. People say, "You have to go to the Lincoln museum." So, yesterday, a good friend of mine who's travelling with me, we were in West Branch, Iowa. Very few people know this, but that's where Herbert Hoover was born and that's where he chose to put his library and museum. Hoover is the oldest, or longest-ago President; in chronology of Presidents, he is the first, or the longest, oldest one to have one of these twelve libraries. So from Hoover, FDR, Truman, Eisenhower and so forth, all have presidential libraries and now it really has become a legacy of each President. There's been, already, a big debate going on as to where President Obama is going to put his, and just about three or four days ago, out in Honolulu, there was a newspaper article about why it should be in Hawaii. The University of Chicago, I understand, has already approached Obama about putting it in Chicago. I'm not going to judge and I'm sure Obama has his own ideas and he'll make that decision. I will say, I hope I'm not PNG from Hawaii, but I cannot imagine one of these presidential libraries and museums being in Hawaii. Chicago would be a much more central location, where I think more people would have access to it, but I'm not going to get into that debate.

DePue: You obviously didn't decide to take these presidential libraries in chronological order, if you will. How did you go about the process of figuring out the plan?

Smith: Once I made this pledge to myself, my family and my friends I was going to visit these presidential libraries, I started in late September of 2009. My first visit was to Boston. I have two very close friends, both retired Marine Corps generals, who are from Boston, and also, my roommate from college lives in Boston, so my first trip, I decided was going to be to Boston. I could do that in a one day trip, leaving early morning from National Airport in Washington, D. C., flying up there, visiting the library for the day and flying back that evening, and there were four of us who made that trip. That was my first one. But it set the tone for the other ones.

The rest of them—before getting as to how I have approached these libraries—then as I looked at the location of these libraries, many of them are sort of grouped in two's. If you go to Kansa City, Missouri, you can drive to Abilene, Kansas, and then back to Independence, Missouri, and visit the Eisenhower and Truman libraries. So I did that in one trip. Then I took another trip up into New York. This was with my wife and very close friends of ours who have a place in upstate New York, and went to Hyde Park. That happened in October of 2009. Then in early December of 2009, I flew to Los Angeles with another friend, and from there, drove to Simi Valley, which is on the outskirts of Los Angeles, which is where the Reagan Library is, and then to Yorba Linda, California, which is where the Nixon Library is. In January of this year, 2010, went down to Atlanta, George, where I met this friend who asked me about my bucket list, and we met in Atlanta and we went to the Carter center. And then flew to Little Rock, Arkansas, on that same trip in January to the Clinton library, and then we went back to our respective homes. My next trip in February, 2010 was to Texas and right now in College Station, Texas, at Texas A & M, is the George H. W. Bush, Bush forty-one, Llibrary, and in Austin, Texas, is the LBJ library and they are quite close, about a hundred miles apart.

Then several weeks ago, I have a relative, a cousin, who lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and so getting from Grand Rapids to West Branch, Iowa, proved too difficult, and since I have a relative who I stayed with in Michigan and went to the Ford museum. The Ford Museum is different from the other eleven in that the Museum is in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Library is a hundred and thirty miles away in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the University of Michigan, which was, of course, Gerald Ford's alma mater, and Grand Rapids is his hometown and the district that he represented in Congress for twenty-five years. So, they bifurcated the museum and library which, I think, by their own admission, doesn't work particularly well and probably will not be duplicated by other presidential libraries and museums.

That left one more and yesterday here, April 1, 2010—I had to Google Earth West Branch, Iowa, to find out where it is and found it—drove there with a good friend. Was not expecting to find much on a Hoover library, but was very pleasantly surprised with what was there and how it's presented. And then we can, again, since I'd heard so much about the Lincoln Museum, wanted to make that part of this trip, too. So, I think I've completed my bucket list as far as the presidential libraries, for the moment, are concerned. I hope to write an article about this experience.

DePue: Did the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum meet your expectations after hearing all of this?

Smith: Yes, in a word. Sometimes I have to think about these things for a couple of days as to how I sort of felt overall. I don't want to make it sound like I'm going around judging or giving grades to all of these libraries and museums, because each one is so different. The Lincoln Museum, as I've just learned today in my visit, you guys have been in business for five years now. One of the things which I learned—it actually was one of the curators at the Bush library in College Station, Texas, who said—"We're in the entertainment business." I mean, really, in designing the exhibits and displays, you want to make something that's interesting to the people. And, most of all for the young people, because young people in the United States, and not just the United States, are woefully uninformed or misinformed about history, most of them. Again, this woman at the Bush administration said younger people today—and by younger, I'm talking high school age kids—they thought that we and Germany fought on the same side in World War II against the Soviets that are Russian. They have no concept of history and World War II and so one of the things a number of these libraries have really active education programs designed for, not just high school, but grade school kids, so that they can learn more about each president and the period of history in which they served.

DePue: Okay. I wonder if you have identified, if you think in the terms of the broad expanse of what you've seen, are there themes that are carried between one library and museum and another? Something that characterizes or represents all of them?

Smith: No. There's not a particular theme that characterizes all of them. Virtually all of them follow sort of the same format, in a way. Each library, of course, is dedicated to the life of the president, whether it's Ronald Reagan or Kennedy or Herbert Hoover or whoever, or Abe Lincoln. You learn at each library about the boyhood life of that person who is going to become President of the United States. What's interesting, is some of the influences on each president, who influenced the child the most. In the case of FDR, his mother was a huge dominating influence on him. They doted over Franklin. A fact that we were told by one of the curators there, Franklin Roosevelt, who grew up in Hyde Park, Franklin Roosevelt was born in Hyde Park. He was born in the house

where he basically lived for the rest of his life, a house called Spring Wood, a beautiful, sort of estate of that Roosevelt family. He loved to sail. It was right on the Hudson River and he loved sailing. He wanted to go to the Naval Academy, but his parents wouldn't let him, so he had to go to Harvard. While he was at Harvard, his mother moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and lived in Cambridge for the four years while Franklin Roosevelt went to school there. Ironically, almost the exact same year, right at the turn of the century, around 1900, General MacArthur went to West Point and his mother lived in the Thayer Hotel in a town right near West Point. So you have these two future leaders, one military, MacArthur, and FDR, whose mothers were huge influences on them. So, getting off your question a little bit, Mark, you learn about different things. Mainly, yesterday, we learned about Hoover being a Quaker and, you know, how did that affect him? LBJ, had a very meager, poor upbringing in Texas and, he became a staunch Democrat in a time when he was quite young; when he started working right after college in various precincts and districts, as sort of a politician's aide, had an influence on him as to what then later lead to the Civil Rights Bill and the Great Society.

DePue: Would you say that these libraries and museums represent the men that they're conveying that history on?

Smith: Well, let me answer that by getting back to sort of what I alluded to before, and that is, before I go to each presidential library, I sit down and I think and I poll some of my friends, what are the three or four or five most defining moments of that presidency, when you think about Jimmy Carter, when you think about Ronald Reagan or FDR? What are the things that you think of that happened during his presidency? And then when I go to the library, I see how those events or incidents or whatever are displayed and some do it better than others.

DePue: Depending on how controversial some of these subjects might be, I would suspect.

Smith: Well, that's exactly right, and one of the things is tension between. Each one of these libraries has a foundation. The Hoover Library they call an association, but the other eleven are all foundations set up either by the former president himself, if he is still alive, the family and friends and they raise money to build the library. The buildings are all done by private donations and some of the libraries, like Clinton's, cost as much as a hundred and sixty million dollars for just the construction of the building and everything. The foundation and the former president want everything to be shown in the best light, so that the legacy of that president is well represented and positively represented. Then you have the National Archives Records Administration, who are professional historians, curators, archivists, who really want to show history, how it really was. So, you have this conflict or tension between the foundation and NARA, National Archives and Records Administration, as to what some of the displays should be. As you might guess, there's a lot of

friction at the Nixon library about certain things. Some of these things have gotten resolved and over time, I suppose, as time passes by, and maybe as the former presidents pass, that this tension will be reduced or alleviated, eliminated. So, what is represented sometimes is the whole story and the true story, the accurate factual story is told. In some others, it's not done very well, in my opinion, as I visited these libraries.

DePue: The first thing that you envisioned is the actual architecture of the building itself. Do you think the architecture reflects the person?

Smith: In some cases, yes, and probably the best case is the Reagan library and museum. He chose this site. He had a couple he wanted to go to have it.

DePue: And there we see Reagan's right now.

Smith: Right. He wanted it to be in California and Stanford made a bit pitch for him, but Ronald Reagan really had no connection with Stanford, so he chose this site in Simi Valley, which is a northern suburb of Los Angeles. It's up on top of this hill and it's a sort or Spanish, low level, low, two story structure that has a lot of Spanish or Mexican architecture. It looks very Reaganesque and it really is spectacular and it is probably what you would expect Ronald Reagan to have. Some of the others, it's hard to say, and, of course, FDR's is right on his boyhood home location in Hyde Park, New York. Abilene, Kansas where Dwight Eisenhower was raised, no offense to the people of Abilene, Kansas, but Abilene, Kansas, looks like it stopped in the 1950s. It is a wonderful, charming little town. I had a couple of great experiences there in addition to visiting the library. But it's on thirty-three acres, his library and museum, and it's almost like a little campus, because on one side of this quadrangle is the museum. The other side is the library. In the middle is about a twenty foot bronze statute of Eisenhower in his army uniform and his Eisenhower coat, as they call them. Down at the far end of the quadrangle are four big bronze plaques-like, about twenty feet tall. Each one is representative of a different part of his career. At the other end of the quadrangle is—Eisenhower did not want it to be called a chapel—he called it a place of meditation, and that's where he and Mamie and a young child, his son who died back in the 1920s, is buried. They're all buried there. So it's a very, sort of like Eisenhower, very well-maintained and orderly and, also, on this little campus, is Eisenhower's boyhood home, which you can go through at its original location.

DePue: The one that struck me in doing the research for this is LBJ's library.

Smith: LBJ's is located in Austin, Texas, and the story there, of course, he wanted his library to be in Texas. Lyndon Johnson had no connection to the University of Texas. He went to Southwest Texas State Teacher's College or something like that. His wife Lady Bird went to UT and she was on the Board of Trustees of the University of Texas when she was a First Lady, and maybe even after. So the University of Texas gave, it's about twenty-some acres

there. It's on the campus of the University of Texas. The University of Texas provided the funds that built the building, the library and museum, which is shown in that picture right there. What you don't see in that picture is immediately to the left, almost immediately to where that picture is cut off, is the Darrell Royal Football Stadium, which seats about a hundred thousand people, so this library is in the shadows, literally in the shadows, of the University of Texas football stadium. It maybe tells you something. I mean, you can be President of the United States in Texas, but you don't outrank Darrell Royal.

DePue: I guess I shouldn't express this, but one of the things that struck me is I don't find it in an evocative or especially handsome building, myself.

Smith: I would agree with that. The setting for that particular library, and let me give you another story here. That library was dedicated in 1971. Remember, Johnson left office in January of 1969. He wanted this built in a hurry—I think, and the curators at the library believe this too—he had some sort of a premonition that he was not long. He died in January of 1974 and this was dedicated in '72. So, he rushed and he pushed the architects and the contractors to complete this building. About half-way through the construction, he found out that there was not a replica of the oval office in his library and he knew that other libraries had replications of the oval office and he wanted one. So they had to redesign and they put it, the oval office, on the tenth floor of that building. It's up on the tenth floor and it's only seven-eighths of the size of the real. All the other libraries say to you, this is an exact replication of the oval office, we have the best and the most exact of that replication of the oval office. The Johnson Library can't make that claim because it's only seven-eighths the size. Because where they had to put it, on the tenth floor; it's not even on the main floor where all the other exhibits are. They only had room to make it so big, but he got it.

DePue: Interesting, because otherwise you think of Johnson as this larger-than-life personality.

Smith: Which he was, which he was, and that's pretty evident. He used that Library for two years while he was alive and almost until he passed away. If I can tell you one other quick story. The Johnson Library is the only one that does not charge admission for the presidential library. President Johnson declared—this is probably because he had a strong backing at the University of Texas—no admission for access to his Library. He also, being a strong personality and also keenly aware of what people thought about him in polls and stuff like that, he wanted his library to be the most visited. And the story is that, in the fall I think, he was in attendance at a game at the University of Texas, and he had the athletic director announce over the public address system that the Johnson Library, literally right across the street from the football stadium, was open and there are rest rooms in the Johnson Library. (DePue laughs) All the people and, at that time, I think their stadium seated about seventy thousand—

now it's a hundred—and all of the people were invited to visit the Library, because he wanted to up the attendance figures.

DePue: I would suspect—just a speculation here—that he would especially want to beat the attendance for the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum.

Smith: I think that's probably true, although the most visited—I learned today—the , the most visited library and museum is the Lincoln Museum. Of the twelve official libraries, the Reagan museum in 2009 had the highest attendance figures. These fluctuate, depending on certain events and other things that happen. Kennedy is also one of the most visited, but your point is well taken; there's not a lot of love lost between the Kennedy people and the Johnson people.

DePue: The Kennedy architecture is certainly very striking, and I wonder if you think that's reflective of the man as well.

Smith: No, and I'll tell you why. The building was designed by I. M. Pei, a famous architect who has done buildings in Washington, D. C. and elsewhere. When Kennedy went to his grave, he thought his library was going to be in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the Harvard campus, right across the street from the Harvard Business School, to be exact. He was then assassinated, of course, and in the 1960s, '65, '66, they were doing design for this library. The city council of Cambridge rose up and vetoed the project because they thought it would add to the congestion in the Cambridge Harvard Square area, would also bring in the riff raff and fast food places and stuff like that, and so they had to find a different location for the Kennedy library. And where that's located is in the south side of Boston, near Dorchester, and it's on Columbia Point, I believe it's called. It's actually a landfill, more precisely a garbage fill area, and the University of Massachusetts has a Boston campus there, but the Kennedy Library, and it does have that I. M. Pei type of design, which actually is not very functional. It may look spectacular from the outside, but there's a lot of sharp corners and things which creates unusable space inside and so forth. And it's really off the beaten path of Boston. Most people go to Boston don't know about the Kennedy library because you really have to go south of Boston. Now it is sitting right on the southern part of Boston Bay, and there's a large atrium, all glass and everything, which looks out on the bay and the skyline of Boston, which is nice, but whether it really is symbolic or reflects Kennedy himself. I don't know if he knows today, that his library's not in Cambridge; it's down in Columbia Point or whatever it's called on the south side of the bay.

DePue: Getting beyond the architecture of the structure, are there any exhibits within these museums that really struck you as capturing the essence of the man?

Smith: (cough) There are; different ones have different large exhibits. The largest exhibit, and it's really spectacular, is at the Reagan museum. It's actually a

separate pavilion that was funded mostly by T. Boone Pickens, and it's administered and maintained under different funding and all, but it's a pavilion that has, almost like suspended, Air Force One, the last 707. The tail number is 27000, if that means anything to you; Air Force One that Reagan used when he visited twenty-seven different countries around the world. So they have this Air Force One mounted on this pedestal in this pavilion that has huge glass walls. And when you board—you can go on board the plane—there's a walkway that you walk on. As you look out through the cockpit, through this glass window—remember, you're on top of a mountain—you feel like you're flying at about ten thousand feet. It really is spectacular. That is the largest display, but whether that represents Reagan or not, I don't know.

DePue: How about the story you were telling at lunch about Gerald Ford, one of the exhibits that got into Gerald Ford's museum.

Smith: Well, this goes back to the tension, the tug-of-war that goes on between the foundation and the professional curators. One of the curators said that they had a way, they'd established contact, to obtain the ladder that was on top of the U. S. Embassy in Saigon, Viet Nam, in 1975, the ladder that people went up to climb on helicopters, that then evacuated them out to sea where there were a number of U. S. ships. The curator said they could obtain this ladder, which would have happened during Gerald Ford's watch in late April 1975. One of the members of the foundation—I'm told, reportedly—I want to quote this a little bit (DePue laughs), I'm told this is a true story—Henry Kissinger, who pontificated and opined that, "Why would we want this ladder displayed at the Museum, because it symbolized defeat and retreat of the Untied States." This discussion went back and forth amongst several people; former President Ford was sitting there and he listened to all of this and finally he injected, he said, "That ladder was part of history and so, therefore, it should be displayed." And that was the end of the discussion. So that particular piece is at the Ford museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I'm trying to think of other displays. Getting back a little bit, and this answers your question, Mark, perhaps indirectly, when I started assessing these libraries and going at it from a very policy oriented, orientation position, wanting to see…

DePue: As a policy wonk yourself?

Smith: As a policy and a political junkie myself, I wanted to see how they represented what I call the four or five defining moments of that particular president, whether those things were displayed or not. What I found out in visiting them is really, these libraries and museums address a lot more, much broader, for two reasons. They show the person's whole life, and in the case of Dwight Eisenhower, he had two major [careers]. All of us would be happy with one of his lives, being a five star general in the military. It was a pretty good career. He was also president of a university, Columbia University; then he became President of the United States for eight years.

DePue: But you said yourself the statue's got him in his Ike jacket.

Smith: The statue has him in his Ike jacket, no question about that. But there's a pretty fair balance at his museum of his military career and also his political career which started in 1952. So the museums cover a person's whole life; they also display a lot of things which, frankly, aren't of foremost interest to myself. I don't care too much about the ladies' gowns that they wore to an inaugural ball and that kind of stuff, but that's, you now, little old ladies from Springfield, Ohio, like to see gowns and stuff like that.

DePue: Is that a common thread through all of the libraries and museums, that there is something about the First Lady?

Smith: Yes, and, of course, virtually all of them, and in the case of Jackie Kennedy. What's really amazing is Jackie Kennedy, when she was in the White House, she was like thirty-one, thirty-two years old, and that's pretty remarkable, when you think about it. We all have kids that are at least that old. But, the impact that she had at that time, in the early '60s, when she was in her early thirties, was pretty remarkable. She was a personality in herself, so, yes, there is a whole alcove dedicated to Jackie Kennedy. Eleanor Roosevelt was another huge influence on Franklin and a strong person, herself. So she occupies quite a bit of space. Lady Bird [Johnson] has an exhibit, which is up on the tenth floor, next to the oval office, so if you venture all the way up to the tenth floor to see the oval office, you can also go through a small wing dedicated to Lady Bird. But she had her causes and issues that she promoted as First Lady.

DePue: You might be hard-pressed to find a First Lady in American history who was more maligned than Mary Lincoln. How do you think our Library and Museum portrayed her life and her contribution?

Smith: I learned quite a bit today about Mary Lincoln. She was a very emotional lady. There was one comment or something I read along the way that her's and Abe's marriage was not always great, I suppose. They may not have been as affectionate towards each other or they sort of were two different people who were joined in matrimony. They had a lot of tragedy in the loss of three of their children, plus Mary Lincoln lost her husband. There was a comment that the night they went to the play at Ford's Theater in 1865 that some people didn't go because Mary Lincoln was going to be in attendance with the President. So she's not a very popular lady. I guess I did not realize that she was that sort of controversial, but she obviously must have been a strong lady, because she expressed her opinion on a lot of things about what her husband was doing as President. I guess she came to Washington, and there was the other issue about North-South because she came from Kentucky and many of the Southerners thought she should be more loyal to the South and the people in the North thought that she was a mole from the enemy's camp. So she couldn't win. I guess she was not very popular.

DePue: But maybe only Jackie Kennedy could understand the amount of grief that she had experienced in her life.

Smith: Jackie Kennedy also lost a child, you're right. Lost a husband. So that's probably true. Good analogy. And Kennedy was only President for two and a half years. Lincoln was four plus.

DePue: I'm going to put you on the spot here with the next couple of questions.

Smith: That's fine.

DePue: Your favorite President, the one that you admire the most, let's put it that way.

Smith: Harry Truman. I mean there's….

DePue: Let me get Truman's library picture up here.

Smith: As I've gone through these presidents' libraries yesterday, I learned things about Hoover that I never knew before; I, honestly, have a lot more respect for Herbert Hoover today than I did three days ago. But Harry Truman, I've read quite a bit about. I think that period, from the mid-1940s, 1945 until 1952, the number of things that happen on his presidency were huge, everything from the Truman Doctrine, Greece and Turkey, and the establishment of the State of Israel, the first dropping the atomic bomb in August of 1945, the 1948 election.

DePue: The Marshall Plan?

Smith: The Marshall Plan, yeah, I mean you get the Korean War, the firing of MacArthur, all sorts of things happened during his presidency. And at the time he was much maligned. I remember—I'm going to show my age again here—my first real political awareness is 1952 or about the same time of March of 1952 when Truman announced that he was not going to run for re-election, although he was eligible, despite the Constitutional amendment. He was eligible to run for another full term. He had already served almost eight years since '45 to '52, but he was eligible to run at the time, but he chose not to. At the time, there was an expression in advertisement for Lucky Strike: LSMFT, Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco. I remember hearing on the radio that LSMFT meant Lord Save Me From Truman. He was vastly unpopular in the early 1950s, but since then, I think—you're more the historian than I and I don't know if there's any definitive poll—but Truman has to be in at least the top ten Presidents that we've had.

DePue: He's certainly had an incredible turnaround in terms of how we see him today. I wonder if you had the opportunity when you visited his Library and Museum, did you also go through the home?

Smith: Yes, of course. The home, which is run by the National Park Service, is about a half a mile from his Museum and Library, and from 1953 until 1972 when he died, while his library was created—I think it was dedicated in 1957, if I remember correctly—he used to walk every day from his house to the Library where he had an office. So, close to fifteen years, that's where he worked. His house is in Independence, Missouri. It is very interesting. It's quite meager, not a lavish house. Truman, when he retired and he left office in January of 1953, there was no presidential pension. It wasn't until the Johnson Administration in the mid-1960s that we started giving former Presidents pension. So, Harry Truman and his wife Bess, they lived on a pension from his Army Reserve days, a hundred and sixty dollars a month. Truman had a farm that was in his family—not a big or really prosperous farm, but in Missouri—that he sold to support him and Bess Truman. They did not live a lavish life at all. Harry Truman believed he should not use the Office of the Presidency, the fact he had been President, for any kind of commercial purposes or personal enrichment. He did not serve on any corporate boards or anything the way some Presidents have since. He did not give speeches for money. He went back to Independence, Missouri, and lived in a house that was her family's, the Wallace family's home, or they owned it, and that's where they lived. It's a very simple home.

DePue: A lesson in humility to see where he was living after being the most powerful man in the world.

Smith: He was a very humble man. He only made two or three trips back to Washington during that time when he was invited. Several times, I know, Johnson went to visit him, once to insist that he accept the Secret Service. It was after Kennedy was assassinated, they put Secret Service on former Presidents. At that time Herbert Hoover, well he died in '64. He was very late in his life when Kennedy was assassinated, but Truman was still alive and Eisenhower was still alive and so they received Secret Service protection. At first, Harry Truman wouldn't accept them, told them get out, and so LBJ went to his home and insisted that he let these people. So they bought the house across the state where the Secret Service lived so they could keep an eye on him as he walked back and forth to his Library.

DePue: We're about ready to run out of time here, unfortunately, but I wonder if you can reflect on what it is that you come away with learning about American history, maybe a different appreciation for it.

Smith: One of my appreciations is for this library system and the fact that not only are there twelve of them that are run by the National Archives, but then there's these other libraries such as this one here in Springfield, Illinois, which are tremendous national resources, and they're spread out across the country, everywhere from West Branch, Iowa, to Simi Valley in California, to Boston, Massachusetts, and Atlanta and Texas. And that people really should take advantage of this and visit these places. They're not very expensive, and the

LBJ library is free. But they all tell a part of the history of this country. There have been forty-three men, all men, forty-three men who have occupied the Office of the President. There's forty-four presidencies, but of course, Cleveland served twice in non-consecutive terms, but these forty-three men had a huge role in shaping the history of this country. And I think knowing something about each one, what their upbringing was like, what are the things that influenced them? What are the things they did before they became President? What are the specific issues that they faced as Presidents of the United States? It's all captured and capitulated in these presidential libraries and museums. I would just encourage more people to visit as many as they could, because I think they will find them all very interesting, informative and entertaining.

DePue: You said you're going to be writing an article about this experience. Any idea what route, what theme you're going to pick up in that article?

Smith: No, and that's why this interview's been interesting, because it helps to sort of formulate some of my ideas. I don't have an exact outlet yet for this article, but I've gotten a tremendous reception, positive reception from people who are really interested in what I've done in visiting them all and they start asking very similar to the ones you've asked me. And so I think that there really is an interest in these and how I'm going to thread it together, that's something in the next few weeks as I write it, I hope to develop.

DePue: We'll certainly be looking forward to seeing that in print. Any final comments for us then?

Smith: No. I'm very happy that I undertook this quest to visit these Presidential libraries. It's been interesting. It's been fun. I've visited some parts of the country I've never been before and met some great people along the way.

DePue: Fred, we're very fortunate that you finished your tour here and have given us the opportunity to talk to you. Thank you very much.

Smith: Thank you, Mark.

DePue: And that concludes our session. Thank you.