

# Federal Reserve Board Oral History Project

Interview with

**Carol Low**

Former Specialist, Federal Open Market Committee Secretariat,  
Division of Monetary Affairs

Date: July 21, 2011, and July 22, 2011

Location: Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: David H. Small

## Federal Reserve Board Oral History Project

In connection with the centennial anniversary of the Federal Reserve in 2013, the Board undertook an oral history project to collect personal recollections of a range of former Governors and senior staff members, including their background and education before working at the Board; important economic, monetary policy, and regulatory developments during their careers; and impressions of the institution's culture.

Following the interview, each participant was given the opportunity to edit and revise the transcript. In some cases, the Board staff also removed confidential FOMC and Board material in accordance with records retention and disposition schedules covering FOMC and Board records that were approved by the National Archives and Records Administration.

Note that the views of the participants and interviewers are their own and are not in any way approved or endorsed by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Because the conversations are based on personal recollections, they may include misstatements and errors.

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## **July 21, 2011 (First Day of Interview)**

MR. SMALL. Today is July 21, 2011. I'm David Small from the FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) Secretariat in the Federal Reserve Board's Division of Monetary Affairs. As part of the Board's Oral History Project, I am interviewing Carol Low, who is also in the Secretariat as a specialist. Ms. Low is a longtime Board employee. She came to the Board in 1970 and is retiring this year. Thank you for taking the time to give us your perspective on how the Board has changed over the years.

MS. LOW. You're welcome.

### **Getting a Job at the Board in the Division of Bank Supervision and Regulation**

MR. SMALL. Let's start with some background and how you came to work at the Board.

MS. LOW. I grew up in a small, rural town in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. I knew little about Washington, D.C. It was kind of like going to a foreign country from where I lived. During high school, on a Senior Skip Day in May 1970, my best friend and I decided that we were going to take a bus into Washington, D.C. As we were riding down Constitution Avenue, I saw the Federal Reserve Board building and said, "That looks like a nice place to work."

[Laughter]

We jumped off the bus, and from Constitution Avenue we walked through the front doors of the Eccles Building. Gina Gander Stevens was one of the personnel recruiting officers at that time. The Board had some positions open for stenographers, and we filled out applications. About a week later, Gina Gander Stevens called and asked when I could start. I was graduating from high school in June, and I wanted a couple of weeks to chill out, so I said, "How about July 6th?" Two days after the July 4th holiday, I started working at the Federal Reserve.

I did not know what the Federal Reserve stood for. I didn't know its purposes and functions. The only thing I knew about the Federal Reserve was that I saw it on the dollar bill. I was hired as a stenographer to work in the Division of Supervision and Regulation, later named Banking Supervision and Regulation (BS&R). At that time, Brent Leavitt was the deputy director. I worked in the bank holding company [area]'s steno pool.

MR. SMALL. What did that type of work involve? Did you go to Board meetings?

MS. LOW. No, no. We took shorthand for the minutes from some of the Board meetings, but we didn't actually go. We went to the director's office or the offices of other BS&R officials and took shorthand for memos prepared for meetings that would come before the Board. We would also substitute for officers' assistants when they were not available. At that time, they were still called "secretaries"; now they're called "assistants." I worked in the steno pool for about five years.

MR. SMALL. So you were 18 or 19 years old?

MS. LOW. I was actually 17 when I started work. I started in July, and my birthday was in September. That was 1970.

MR. SMALL. So Arthur Burns was Chairman.

MS. LOW. Arthur Burns was Chairman. He left in early 1978. Then G. William Miller came. Miller wasn't here for long. He was here for about a year or so. And then Paul Volcker came.

MR. SMALL. So, being a very young African American woman in the 1970s, what kind of place was the Board when you came?

MS. LOW. I was very green.

MR. SMALL. Was the Board very open? Did everyone talk to everyone, or did you remain in your little slot?

MS. LOW. I stayed within the division. We floated around through the division—mergers and acquisitions and all those different areas. You filled in. But I didn't have any connections with or any work in the other divisions of the Board. I was basically in BS&R, the bank holding company area, and worked for Jack Lyon, who was an assistant director at that time. I stayed in the steno pool for about four or five years. Then I worked for Bob Fisher. He was an officer in the Division of Research and Statistics.

When I went over to Research, the Board had just started leasing other spots. We had a spot over at the Watergate.

MR. SMALL. Over the years, you got involved in some very substantive work for the FOMC Secretariat. But when you first came to the Board as part of the steno pool, what did you see as your career path going forward?

MS. LOW. When I started out as a stenographer in BS&R and was filling in for the officers' assistants, I said to myself that one day I would be in one of these positions working for the head of a division. After moving to Research and working there for a while, the secretary to Jack Lyon, the BS&R director, decided to retire, and Jack Lyon contacted me to see if I wanted to work for him. I said, "Yes." I worked in BS&R for about 10 years.

### **Moving to the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) Secretariat**

Back then, the Board posted jobs on a little posting board. I saw a job opening for working for Murray Altmann in the FOMC Secretariat. (He was an assistant to the Board in the Office of Staff Director for Monetary and Financial Policy.) I had no knowledge of what the FOMC was at that point. But I applied for the job, and I was selected. This was around 1980.

I had an interview with Murray Altmann, and he said, “I’ll be in touch.” The Board used to have an annual Christmas party where the whole Board shut down, so to speak, so that everybody could attend. It wasn’t limited to divisionwide parties on particular days, as it generally is today. It was a Boardwide party paid for by the Board. I think it was held in the atrium of the Eccles Building. I happened to run into Murray Altmann at that party. He said, “Do you want the job?” [Laughter] I said, “Well, yes!” He said, “When can you start?” So working for him was my entry into the FOMC Secretariat.

MR. SMALL. At the time, who else was in the Secretariat?

MS. LOW. Murray was the FOMC Secretary. Normand Bernard was the Assistant Secretary. Peter Keir was an associate economist. Debbie Deck and Nancy Steele were there. The offices were where Public Affairs is right now—we were in that corridor. My duties at that point were being Murray’s secretary. We would transcribe the FOMC meetings. There were three secretaries—Chris Klapput, Darlene Grant-Brown, and myself. We would divide up the tapes, and we typed them. Nancy Steele did the editing. At this point, the transcripts were only for working documents to get the minutes out.

### **Work Environment at the Board in the 1970s**

MR. SMALL. Before we get too much into the Secretariat, let’s loop back a bit. For your first 10 years, what was the working culture like at the Board? As a woman, as an African American, was there a glass ceiling that was clearly visible? Was there camaraderie? Where did you get your support? Is it very different now from back then, and what was it like back then?

MS. LOW. For women and African Americans, there was a very visible glass ceiling. The steno pool was all female. There were about six or seven women in the pool. Three of them were Caucasian, and everybody else was African American. Carol Slocum-Harlow was the

manager. Cathy Nickens-Ross, an African American, was the assistant manager. In 1970, it was a big deal that she was in a managerial position. Barbara Driggins was also in the steno pool at that time.

When I first arrived, I didn't know anyone. I was completely out of my element. Barbara was the first person who befriended me. She would ask if I would like to go to lunch with her group, and I said, "Yes." That started a friendship that has carried on today. All of us that were in that steno pool—those of us who are still around in this area are still close-knit friends. We've supported each other through all of our ups and downs. Our children know each other. We go to each other's children's' weddings and graduations, et cetera. It was like a family. We all even had lunch with the manager, Carol Slocum-Harlow.

All of us that are still in the area get together maybe once or twice a year, have lunch, and catch up on what everybody's doing. The atmosphere, the climate, and the support that each of us had for each other made this an excellent place to be. You couldn't ask for a better place to work in those days. We all supported each other in our endeavors. The Board had just started its educational program where you could go to school to boost your careers and get into different job families, and the Board would pay for it, provided you passed each class.

MR. SMALL. Did any of you take advantage of that?

MS. LOW. One co-worker in the pool took advantage of it early on. After she left the pool, she went to the Division of Reserve Bank Operations. At the time, she was going to school for information systems, which turned out to be an excellent choice. She was able to attain the position of Chief Information Officer at the Treasury. So she was in SES (Senior Executive Service), making six figures. And that all stemmed from here.

Most of the rest of us did well, I think. We all got into positions that were impressive in those days. This wasn't just a place to come to work from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and go home. We shared and cared, and it went beyond the 9-to-5. I think all of us have stayed here at least 30 years. Of my small group, I think I stayed the longest.

MR. SMALL. Did you feel challenged? Did you feel there was advancement and movement?

MS. LOW. Yes, absolutely. Back then, you didn't have to actually look for positions. When positions opened that you were potentially qualified for, you could be approached with, "Look, this job is coming up. Are you interested?" Now you have to look for jobs and initiate moving up in the organization.

Back then, the pay system had step increases. It was easy to move up the ladder in your career family. It was difficult to move out of your job family, however. It was challenging, especially for African American women and even more so for African American men. There were very few here at that time. Most of the male African American employees were working in the print shop or in Building Services. Until about 20 years ago, none were in managerial positions.

MR. SMALL. Was the Board actively involved in affirmative action, or do you think the Board went along with the pace of progress in society generally?

MS. LOW. Yes, somewhat so. I think perhaps, at that time, you had more opportunity at the Board than you would have in other government agencies if you had a good attendance record, you didn't abuse your leave, and you worked diligently. I hope I'm speaking for the whole Board, Boardwide, but in BS&R we were very conscious of the quality of work that we were expected to do. And I think that had a lot to do with the ability to progress. All of us in my

small group of co-workers took pride in the work we delivered. We wanted to make sure we did a good job. We were dependable and were here when needed.

When I took the job in the FOMC Secretariat office, I was told that one of the requirements of the job was that you could not take off the week before, of, and after an FOMC meeting. That's why I have so much accumulated sick leave. [Laughter] You needed to be here. I've come to work many days not feeling well during those times, but I knew it was important that I be here, so I came to work. There was no such thing as missing an FOMC meeting—unless you were dying. [Laughter]

### **The FOMC Secretariat**

MR. SMALL. In the mid-to-late 1980s, I was involved in the Bluebook preparation. There was this procedure before a meeting, to get the Bluebook out on time, where you'd have these editing sessions. We'd be editing until midnight, and then the print shop would get something. People were in the print shop until 3:00 in the morning.

MS. LOW. Yes, I was involved in all of that.

MR. SMALL. Could you go through each step of producing the document?

MS. LOW. Yes. Don Kohn was the director of the Division of Monetary Affairs. The Bluebooks were being produced and distributed on Fridays. Once I was here from Friday morning until I drove home and pulled into my garage at 6:30 a.m. Saturday morning. I got an apology from Don the next week. He said, "I know that's the record, and I apologize for keeping you here." But that was the process at that time. The documents were physically being shipped to the Reserve Banks.

MR. SMALL. The Bluebooks were completed by Friday and then delivered to the homes of Reserve Bank presidents on the Saturday before an FOMC meeting the following week?

MS. LOW. Right. Arrangements were made to either have the book delivered directly to the presidents' homes or somebody at the Reserve Bank would pick it up and take it to the president's house, because they would be getting on a plane to get back here. The meetings were on the following Tuesdays. I was involved in all of those steps. Now I send the [Open Market] Desk report to the print shop electronically. Then I'll go down and pick it up. Guys in the print shop have said, "Remember those days when we used to sit here and wait and wait and wait for you all?" I said, "Yes, I remember those days! I can't forget those days." Now it's just so simple to me.

I think, in 2000, one of the shipments of Bluebooks got lost and was never found. We did everything to retrieve it, but nobody could find it. It just vanished, disappeared. If it ever shows up, it will be old enough that it has already been released. [Laughter]

### **FOMC Meeting Tape Recordings**

MR. SMALL. So when you arrived in the Secretariat, tapes of FOMC meetings became a hot-button issue when Representative Henry Gonzalez suddenly discovered that the meetings were being recorded. Do you remember that?

MS. LOW. I do. I wasn't personally involved, but I was in the office when Gonzalez's representative came down to see some of the material. From Day 1 that I came into the Secretariat, we were transcribing tapes. Tapes were being recorded of the meetings. The meetings were being transcribed verbatim as the work product to get out the minutes, the so-called Minutes of Actions, the forerunner of today's FOMC minutes. We would transcribe the tapes, and the transcripts would be used to write the minutes. Then the tapes would be stored in a closet until they were needed to be recorded over for a new meeting. We would go through the process of degaussing them, erasing the tapes so that they could be used for another meeting.

That's just because we had run out of blank tapes. We never thought that they were ever going to be made public, because nothing was being released during that era.

MR. SMALL. You reused the tapes on an as-needed basis, so some old recordings could be lying around for quite a while before you got around to needing them?

MS. LOW. Right. And at that time, I think the FOMC tapes were not FOIA-able (subject to the Freedom of Information Act). I don't think anybody even thought about anybody wanting to FOIA the tapes. In the FOMC meetings, there were microphones around the table. The attendees knew they were being recorded, but not for publication.

Murray and some of the other people used to take notes of what was going on in the meetings. Then, after the meeting, they would get together to get a complete record of what happened. Somebody might have caught this, somebody might have caught that. They'd piece it together, and that's how they would come up with the minutes. But then, I guess, it got so hectic that they decided we needed to record this to make sure that nothing was missed.

MR. SMALL. The participants knew they were speaking into microphones, but did they know they were being recorded, or did they maybe think the mikes were just for amplification without recording?

MS. LOW. I'm pretty sure, when Volcker was here, they thought it was for amplification for other participants around the table and for the Secretariat to use if they had questions about something that they didn't catch. I think when Greenspan came, he knew that they were being recorded, but I'm not sure that he knew for what purpose, whether it was solely for in-the-room amplification or whether they were being used to be typed up verbatim for the minutes.

MR. SMALL. What was the process of writing the minutes? Was that solely a staff process?

MS. LOW. Right.

MR. SMALL. Did that go to the Chairman or any Governor?

MS. LOW. No, it was only a Secretariat product. The tapes would be transcribed verbatim. Nancy would make handwritten edits to fill in the blanks, because back then the quality of the recordings wasn't very good. Then the FOMC Secretary and the Assistant Secretary would write the policy portions of the meetings and the actions that were taken to be recorded in the minutes. They would use the transcripts to make the minutes, and then they would put them in a file cabinet. No cleanup draft was done. That's what we were calling the "raw" transcripts. They were only used for the purpose of creating the minutes, not to have them published or anything.

MR. SMALL. Chairman Burns ended up taking a batch and putting them—

MS. LOW. In his library.

MR. SMALL. So there were two sets—one in the Secretariat, one for him?

MS. LOW. I don't recall them giving him—I think he may have requested what he said at some meetings or whatever. That's why he was given a copy of the transcript. But they weren't distributed to participants for their input or editing, like it is now. In some instances where people may have forgotten what they said, they may have asked for that, and we would have given only that to them. But I don't remember being involved in giving anybody any transcripts. That was done through, I guess, the FOMC Secretary, Steve Axilrod, or whoever may have corresponded with the participant. They could have said, "I can provide you with what you said," because we had this typed up.

MR. SMALL. So I guess when you got to the Secretariat, Chairman Burns was already gone.

MS. LOW. Yes.

MR. SMALL. Chairman Miller was there?

MS. LOW. No, Miller was gone too. I moved in December 1980, so Paul Volcker was the Chairman.

### **Chairman Volcker**

MR. SMALL. Did you have an image of Paul Volcker?

MS. LOW. Well, I personally thought he was rude [laughter], because he would talk with his cigar in his mouth. That's rude! And I used to hate to have to transcribe him. He was horrible to transcribe, because he'd sit there talking with his cigar in his mouth. I knew who he was, because he was very tall. Almost everybody knew who Paul Volcker was.

When Chairman Miller was here, I was still working in BS&R. Miller went around and physically visited all of the offices at the Board. We were in the Martin Building, and he came over to where I was on the third floor. I just happened to look up, and there was Chairman Miller standing there saying "hello" and shaking my hand. Everybody thought that was great. Volcker never did that. I remember one time this woman got in the elevator with Volcker. He was smoking his cigar. She complained and said, "You don't need to be smoking in an elevator." She didn't know who he was! He just laughed and didn't say anything. When he got off the elevator, he laughed and said, "Who was that?" I don't know whether anybody knew who she was.

When I worked in BS&R, before the Martin Building was built, BS&R was in the Eccles Building. The second floor of the Eccles Building was kind of off limits to the average employee. You couldn't just go over there. I'm sure it's still like that now. You could show your badge and go over, but you had to have a purpose to go over there. At first I was very

intimidated about being over there, seeing the Governors daily, but soon realized that they're just like us. [Laughter]

Normand Bernard was the FOMC Assistant Secretary when I came in. Murray Altmann was the FOMC Secretary.

MR. SMALL. Arthur "Art" Broida had retired as FOMC Secretariat. Had Steve Axilrod moved in?

MS. LOW. Yes, Steve Axilrod was the Staff Director for Monetary Policy. When Murray retired, Steve Axilrod became the Secretary. That's when they started having the dual roles of Secretary–Economist, because Mr. Axilrod was also an economist of the FOMC.

MR. SMALL. Did the switch to Axilrod change things?

MS. LOW. No, but I felt that it was a great injustice to Normand Bernard that he didn't become the Secretary. All his years in the Secretariat—he never became Secretary of the FOMC, always Assistant Secretary. I don't know why or what went down. That was then, and when Don overlooked him again—so it's always been, like, this dual role, until today. Bill English is the Secretary.

**July 22, 2011 (Second Day of Interview)****More on the FOMC Secretariat**

MR. SMALL. We were talking about life in the FOMC Secretariat. You had a small section. It was your office's responsibility to get the Bluebooks out. Another division puts the Greenbooks together. You had some responsibility for stuffing envelopes and getting the Bluebook delivered to Governors and Reserve Bank presidents. You were up against very hard deadlines.

MS. LOW. Yes.

MR. SMALL. Could you talk about the mechanics of the Bluebook process: the editing, the compilation, and the printing, and physically how, in your early days in the Secretariat, that mechanically happened, getting a copy to the Reserve Banks?

MS. LOW. The Bluebook editing in Steve Axilrod's or Don Kohn's office never started until about 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. on Friday. When we first started out, we had to get it to the FedEx office. Once the Bluebook was created, it was copied in the print shop. Then copies would be brought up to my office, and I would stuff 12 sets of envelopes for each of the Federal Reserve Districts. For security reasons, we were double-stuffing the envelopes. The Bluebooks were put in double-stuffed envelopes and then into these humongous, dirty [laughter] FedEx bags.

We had a deadline to get them to the FedEx office on L Street, I think. That was the closest office at that time. We had to get them there by 8:00 p.m. in the evening. So there was this mad dash of getting this stuff accomplished so that the Board chauffeur could take the packages to the FedEx building office drop-off, and then they would be delivered to the respective Districts the next day.

MR. SMALL. I remember being here much later Friday night.

MS. LOW. Right. That was in the very beginning of when I started doing this. But as technology improved, we contracted with this courier that would come in and take the packages to BWI for the first flight out on Saturday morning. That gave the Bluebook team a little more time to fight over their “of” and “the” and “at” and “that,” and the time started getting later—around 9:00 p.m. The Board paid the courier wait time. The company didn’t care if the person came and stayed here two hours and waited for the package. So, as technology improved, the length of the meetings to write the Bluebook grew longer.

MR. SMALL. You’d be here at midnight sometimes.

MS. LOW. Oh, yes. Midnight was the norm for Bluebook nights. Don and others would clean it up and finish their part about 9:00 p.m. Then they would have the proofreaders and the chart readers reading it.

Then Don’s secretaries, Kathy Matthews and Rivane Bowden, used to get it down to the print shop. The guys in the print shop would be sitting around waiting for it. [Laughter] The overtime pay for the production of the Bluebook got to be quite extensive after a while. There were special copy machines, and they were subject to breaking down. Six out of 12 months they broke down, which added to the length of time that I would get a finished product back.

Then once that happened, I had to stuff the envelopes. We also would have a messenger waiting around. Once I finished the envelopes and had them stuffed, then they would take them down to the courier, who would be sitting in the visitors area waiting for us to hand him the packages, all the while having no idea [about] the contents of the packages.

As stated earlier, the record for getting home was 6:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning after a Bluebook session, which was crazy. I hadn’t slept all night after being at the Board since 9:00 a.m. Friday morning. I told myself that “I’m not doing that anymore.” I think Don realized

that it was crazy. He didn't get home that late, but some other people and I did. That's when, I think, they started the Bluebook sessions earlier—like, on Thursday—to avoid that happening again.

MR. SMALL. And this was all under very tight security. These are very secure, confidential documents.

MS. LOW. Oh, yes. The Bluebook is Class I. The Greenbook, Part 2, was Class II, and [Greenbook,] Part 1, was Class I. I think those are the same classifications today.

I had contracted with couriers in each Reserve District to deliver the packages first thing Saturday morning to the Reserve Banks. The Reserve Banks had personnel waiting for the delivery to take the document to the president's home.

MR. SMALL. Any incidents where it was shipped to the wrong guy or the wrong house?

MS. LOW. Well, there was one incident when one package got lost, and, as of today, was never recovered. At that time, I was sending four Bluebooks, and a packet to one Reserve Bank did not make it. When the guys arrived at the Board on Monday, I provided them with extra copies. Bob Frazier was the head of Support Services at that time. His guys worked tirelessly to find out where the package went. It disappeared. [Laughter] We never found it.

MR. SMALL. Ultimately, you sent the documents electronically. Did that make it easier, or did that give another reason for delay, because you could always send it even later?

MS. LOW. That indeed added to the length of time, because the drafters realized that since it was being delivered electronically, they had more time to clean it up or perfect it. If new data came in on Fridays that they wanted to incorporate into the Bluebook, they had that flexibility. In the very early stages of SDS (the FOMC's Secure Document System)—Gary Gillum was involved in developing that database—we were only sending the Bluebook

electronically. Research would not allow us to send the Greenbook electronically. Consequently, we were still sending the Greenbook in hard copies.

MR. SMALL. Because that went out earlier, you had more time?

MS. LOW. Right. We first started out with the Bluebook. I think it was a couple of years later before we were able to send the Greenbooks electronically, which ultimately eliminated sending documents physically.

MR. SMALL. In 1979 and 1980 under Volcker, when the Board switched to targeting the monetary aggregates, some money numbers came out on Friday. That switch in procedures made those numbers more important, so it made it more important to get them into the Bluebook, which is a real functional business need to wait until Friday—not just human nature. [Laughter]

MS. LOW. Right, yes. But some of the other parts of the document weren't waiting on those numbers. They started those on Thursdays to advance the process. Even in the stages when we were doing it electronically, I had a laptop at home hooked up to the Board through dial-up—we didn't have the NRAS (National Remote Access Services) cards. I remember Jim Clouse calling me at 10:00 p.m. and saying, "We're almost there. We're proofing it now. It should come to you in the next 20 minutes!" And then it would be another hour. [Laughter] This procedure made my life a lot better, because at least I got to go home at the regular time to wait for the call informing me that the document was available to send via the SDS.

MR. SMALL. You had that rigid schedule, but you also had a rigid schedule of actually attending FOMC meetings. It wasn't just one night, eight times a year. How long was an FOMC cycle when you had to be at the Board?

MS. LOW. Basically, it was the week before the meeting, the week of the meeting, and about half of the week after the meeting. At this time, I was transcribing the meetings alone. My

name became very visible around the Board, because I used to go through massive amounts of envelopes every cycle, distributing FOMC documents for internal distribution as well as sending to the Reserve Banks. Each envelope had to be sealed with a sticker that was stamped “FOMC C. Low.” I maintained a listing of who had access to which documents, who had access to the Bluebook, Greenbook Part I and/or Greenbook Part II, and any additional memos. The list changed constantly. This was important to ensure that the right documents got into the right hands.

So the prep work the week before the FOMC meeting involved the actual distribution of all the documents for the meeting. Then I would also prepare documents—such as the seating charts, voting lists, et cetera—for the Secretary’s use at the meeting. Usually on the Monday evening before the meeting, staff [members] were still finalizing the directive, which is now table 1, so to speak. The latest versions of documents, the minutes, and the directive would have to be sent to Reserve Bank presidents at their hotels. Because nobody had laptops at that time, the only way they had access to the documents was hard copies. Additionally, I would do all of the legwork for having Building Services set up the Board table, adding and arranging chairs for the members according to the seating charts. I would attend the meeting.

During that era, I started staying late from Tuesday or Wednesday or whenever the meetings ended to prepare a raw draft of the transcript. That would take approximately one to two days; I would be finished usually by that Friday afternoon or Monday. For a meeting of two days, it would carry out to maybe Wednesday or Thursday of the next week.

MR. SMALL. Did you have a timetable for transcribing the tape? Was there someone waiting to use the transcript?

MS. LOW. It wasn't a smooth process. I was unable to start from the beginning of the tape to the end of the tape. There would be requests for "What did so-and-so say about so-and-so?" [or] "I need this for that." So I was jumping around and going back and forth, which was time-consuming, because you had to search through the recording. We didn't have the system that we currently use, whereas you can more readily locate a speaker. I'd have to scroll through it, because we were using cassette tapes. We didn't have the cards. So it was a bit hectic.

MR. SMALL. So those three weeks, before, during, and after the FOMC meeting, what was your average workweek? Was there a lot of overtime?

MS. LOW. Yes. By the time we finished that cycle, it was time to start preparation for the new meeting. I always had to have leave put in the leave bank, because I couldn't take it. I was the Girl Friday. [Laughter]

MR. SMALL. What happens if there is a leak?

MS. LOW. When there was a leak, I'm not sure whether they were the FBI or the IG (Inspector General) investigators, but they physically came into the office and went through all of my records. I also had access records for the Reserve Banks. During that time, I had to write everybody's name and an assigned number for Greenbooks and Bluebooks that were distributed. We actually had to do a recall. Everybody had to send their Bluebooks and Greenbooks (Parts I and II) back to the Secretariat. I'm not sure what purpose they got out of that, but we had to recall the documents. They wanted to make sure that people who had been cleared to receive the information actually got it, and nobody else got a hold of it and consequently leaked information. I think they stayed in the office a good three or four days, combing through all of my records, making copies to take with them. They made a report, but I'm not aware if they ever found out where the origin of the leak came from.

MR. SMALL. But it was pretty serious and detailed.

MS. LOW. It was pretty serious, yes. I was doing the transcripts in the office after work hours. During the day I had no time to work on the transcripts, because there were other things that had to be done. Memos went out after the meeting, like they do now.

I'm not sure how this came about, but it was decided that, after the meeting, I should stay home to work on the transcript in order to finish sooner. So that became the procedure after our meeting. The next three or four days I would stay home and, all day long, type transcripts from the audio. I would be in communication with Normand and Don, because I was abstracting pieces to get to people so they could write up their part of the minutes. Then we would piece it all together and have it as a transcript. At that time, we started to send the transcripts to the participants for editing.

My life revolved around the meetings. I had to plan all of my personal business around FOMC meetings. I couldn't get sick (it was "understood" that I get a flu shot every year). When I took the job, I was told that I could not take off during an FOMC meeting cycle, the week before and after. No leave would be approved. I'd have to be in the hospital [laughter] in order to be out during that time period. I'm not sure whether this is fortunate or unfortunate, but I never missed an FOMC meeting. From the day I started going until February 2010, when I went out for my back surgery, I never missed an FOMC meeting.

MR. SMALL. Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, staff members are mandated to completely miss at least one FOMC meeting, so that it's a test of backup and redundancy.

MS. LOW. But no such plan was in place at that time for me.

MR. SMALL. Was 9/11 a big change?

MS. LOW. Yes. But the FOMC Secretariat had not been able to do that. We were still working with a skeleton crew—three or four people. Nobody had a backup. Normand, of course, had Don, but Don didn't have time to do the type of work that Normand was responsible for. I'm not sure how to describe it, but we were kind of, like, in—[laughter]

MR. SMALL. If I'm reading your expression correctly, you now can't believe how you operated back then.

MS. LOW. Exactly, yes, because it was crazy! We couldn't get sick. [Laughter] It was really crazy.

MR. SMALL. But that seemed normal and acceptable at the time? That was just the way the world was, or did it seem odd?

MS. LOW. It was extremely odd to me. I complained to Norm quite often. I don't think it went anywhere past him. [Laughter] But I just thought it was crazy. At the time, I used to tell him, "I live in Clinton, Maryland, 20 miles away. Traffic is terrible. If I'm in a car accident trying to come to work, what are you going to do?"

MR. SMALL. And what about snowstorms?

MS. LOW. One time, the Board chauffeur came to pick me up and took me home. And a couple times, I was put up in a hotel to make sure I was at the Board the next day for the FOMC meeting. [Laughter] I've been through all of those things. I can't believe that the Don Kohns of the world and other people in charge couldn't see the necessity of having somebody prepared to fill in if the unexpected should happen.

MR. SMALL. You had proved your reliability, I guess.

MS. LOW. I guess too well! [Laughter] They just figured that I'd be here.

MR. SMALL. And they were right!

MS. LOW. They were right. I've always been in a Board vanpool or carpool. Sometimes we would get caught in traffic, and we wouldn't get here on time at 8:00 a.m. If I wasn't here at my desk by 9:00, Norm would be in a panic mode: "Oh, my God, has anybody seen Carol?" The staff would say, "She's coming. We saw her." Norm would sigh and say, "Okay, we're okay today." But it was just crazy that was allowed to happen. Looking back on that, especially in today's world, it's just surreal.

MR. SMALL. How does it differ today?

MS. LOW. That would never be accepted.

MR. SMALL. Today there're all kinds of redundancies?

MS. LOW. Yes. And there is a lot of backup. Out of an abundance of caution, they have all these things in place.

On Fridays, Norm would often go to the liquor store up the street and purchase Powerball tickets, one for himself and one for me. [Laughter] I used to say, "Norm, you're going to bring me the winning lottery ticket one day, and I'm going to quit on the spot!" And he would say, "I'll buy you a ticket if you promise me that you will not just walk out." [Laughter] Looking back at my role and the hats that I wore, it's amazing that it all worked out. I was living on the edge. It boggles my mind.

MR. SMALL. Was it satisfying after an FOMC cycle was put to bed?

MS. LOW. No, because I didn't have time to sit back and just say, "We got this one done." It seemed like every FOMC meeting, no matter how much the staff gave the Committee members, they always wanted/needed more. They would say, "All the memos were wonderful. They offered a lot of information, and they gave us good hindsight and all, but I'd like to see so

and so and so.” Then the staff would be off doing all these different new memos to satisfy those requests, which involved the Secretariat.

Every document had to go through the Secretariat. Mike Prell (Director of the Division of Research and Statistics) and Ted Truman (Director of the Division of International Finance) couldn't just have their offices send the documents. They would prepare the documents and give me the original. Then I would have to get it printed, mailed, and distributed to where it had to go. Now you have SDS same-day service. Five times a day, you'll see a document is ready in SDS. Back in the day, all those had to be done by hand. It was laborious. I didn't have time to sit there and think, “How can I improve this?” which I would have loved to have done. I didn't have time to figure out how we can do this better, not until the staff expanded. Now that the staff has doubled, we've got all these creative, great things that would have been wonderful back when I was doing all this solo.

MR. SMALL. You mentioned that when former colleagues from the Secretariat wander in nowadays, their eyes get wide, and they say, “My goodness, the resources are wonderful!”

MS. LOW. Yes. The people in my vanpool knew my schedule, because I would say, “I'm not riding in the van today. I have to drive in, because I'm working late.” For the FOMC meeting days, the media would be outside waiting for Greenspan, to see what side he was carrying his briefcase on. The women in the vanpool would laugh and say, “They're after the wrong person! They should be after you. You've got the goodies!” They knew that I was at home transcribing tapes. They would say, “God, if people knew that.” And I said, “Yes, God forbid if they knew that! I would not be safe!”

MR. SMALL. As you reflect back on your career, was that too intense? Did all the short-term requirements affect your ability to develop longer term?

MS. LOW. Absolutely. It's great to be needed. And I really felt needed. I know I was needed. But it did not allow me the opportunity to grow and develop to the full potential I believe I was capable of achieving.

MR. SMALL. You mean, at the highest level?

MS. LOW. Right. I think I could have contributed more substantially to the Board if I didn't have to do all of these time-consuming, laborious tasks. But, having said that, I understood that these behind-the-scene tasks contributed to the functions of FOMC meetings.

MR. SMALL. In some respect, if you want something done on time and exactly right, 10,000 times in a row, you need someone who's sort of overqualified for the job to get it done every single time.

MS. LOW. Yes. And I think that helped, as far as Norm was concerned. He didn't have to micromanage me. He knew that it was going to be done right. He didn't have to worry about that, which is a credit to me. But I could have and should have been utilized better. I could have assisted in editing the transcripts. I could've assisted by creating administrative memos and other documents of that nature. I provided answers to FOIA letters and general inquiries to outside requests for information, but time was limited to address to these issues. I feel that I was not able to show my full colors, so to speak. I know I could've contributed more to the Federal Reserve Board.

### **Reflections on Board Career**

MR. SMALL. If Carol Low today could talk to the 17-year-old Carol Low who walked in off Constitution Avenue, what would you advise her to do about career management?

MS. LOW. I would advise her to be more vocal about what she wants to do, be more aggressive in going about it. I got caught up in simply doing the task. I didn't take the initiative

to demonstrate I was capable of handling more challenging duties. If you do something long enough, you are able to do it in your sleep. Then you don't have any more challenges. You feel stagnated. I went back to school. I proved that I was a quick study. I graduated summa cum laude in getting my bachelor's degree while performing the aforementioned tasks I was responsible for.

When I was doing my master's, I was able to take a lot of online courses. I expressed the desire to move into professional work for the division. Norm was always saying, "Well, you need to be an economist. You need to do this. You need to have a degree." No discredit to Norm, but I think he was apprehensive to allow me out of his comfort zone. [Laughter] He was comfortable with me getting things done unsupervised. And if I was allowed to step aside from that and do some other things, someone else would have to be trained to perform those duties. Unfortunately, he was unwilling to support my goals.

MR. SMALL. Is there anything in particular that you would say to a woman or an African American about [going] to work for the Board today?

MS. LOW. An African American woman or man, first of all, has to have the credentials. In my opinion, the Board is very degree oriented. If you don't come in with a degree, you're going to have to really prove yourself, above and beyond, that you're capable, especially if you're an African American. You're going to have to prove yourself, and even when you get your degree, you're going to have to be better than others. Unfortunately, I believe the Board is a white, male-dominated institution. And I think it probably always will be. [Laughter]

The Board broke the barrier in having the first woman Vice Chair, which was a long time coming. When I was attending the FOMC meetings, I would look around the table when Governor Emmett Rice was there, and there were just two blacks in the room—him and myself.

During that time there was a black director from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, one of the research directors attending meetings. At the coffee breaks, when everybody congregated out in the Oval Room for coffee, and other Board employees saw the director, this black professional guy there, it was like, "Oh, my God!" It was a big deal.

MR. SMALL. And this was in the 1980s.

MS. LOW. My opinion is that they've got to at least have a master's degree today in order to be able to succeed here. Being in the FOMC Secretariat for 30 years, there were some job openings that came up on the Board that I applied for. One was in the Division of Consumer Affairs. It was a secretary position like the Secretary of the FOMC, not a secretary to a person. I got an interview for the job because I had a degree. But the feedback that I got was that I didn't have enough experience in managing.

So I would tell somebody that unless your current position provides the skills necessary to enhance your goals, don't stay in that position and become stagnate. I felt that happened to me. Even though I had the education, I didn't have the necessary experience to qualify for professional positions that I was interested in at the Board because I stayed in the same position too many years.

MR. SMALL. So, to summarize your advice, especially early in your career: Be attuned to what experiences you're getting, what skills you're building, be aggressive, and be outspoken. Don't just be a good, hard worker in a narrow slot.

MS. LOW. Right, unless you're complacent. If this is your final stop in your career, then that's fine. But if you want to move up, you have to take your career in your own hands and be aggressive.

MR. SMALL. Originally, did you think of your Board job as just a stop in your career? Did you interview at other places?

MS. LOW. No! I never went job hunting! On my Senior Skip Day, I got off of the bus, saw this building, came in, and filled out an application, and in a week's time was asked when I could start. I never interviewed for another job. I never went to McDonald's, IHOP, or any of the retail places to apply for a job. Right out of high school I came here. To me that was an accomplishment—especially coming from a rural area, not knowing much about D.C., and not knowing anything about the Federal Reserve. I landed this fantastic job. I think my salary was going to be around \$4,000. That's what the stenographers were making at that time. That was great money in 1970 for an inexperienced person with a high school diploma.

MR. SMALL. Other than the pay, how did the Board measure up?

MS. LOW. It was very warm; the people were very caring. The benefits were great. We had the credit union. Shortly after I started working, the Thrift Plan was created. At that point, I think we were getting 50 cents on the dollar or something like that. I had landed into a great spot. The people were very nice. When I first came, there weren't a lot of blacks, but there were a good number. There was a sense that the Board really cared about your well-being.

About 10 years down the line, they started the educational program where the Board paid for my A.A., my B.A., and my master's degree. When I was taking those classes, the conversation would come up between peers about who was paying their tuition. When they found out that my job was paying my whole tuition, paying for the books and all this, they couldn't believe it, because the other agencies weren't doing that. That was a great benefit. Other than the military, which pays for its GIs to go to school, this was the best thing going, as

far as being able to get a degree while you were working. I made some great friends here, genuine friends. Today we're still friends.

I've had friends that didn't stay at the Board. They went to different agencies or to private industry. When we socialize, they say that the other agencies don't stand up, as far as the quality of work product that's turned out at the Board. People have gone to work at [the] Treasury, at HUD, and other places. I was told that the Board would never tolerate the quality of work that is allowed to go out of those places.

Recently, I went to a 60th birthday party for a friend, and I ran into a co-worker, a person that used to work here. I told her that I was getting ready to retire after 41 years, and she said, "Oh my God, if I had only stayed! That could be me!" We came in the same year, 1970, and she said, "You just can't beat the benefits. I know you're going to be okay because of the Board." She works for a legal company. She said, "Our benefits are great, but they don't touch the Board's benefits." So people still view the Board as a place that takes good care of its employees. The Board keeps embellishing the Thrift Plan for us. When I told them that the Board was giving everybody a 1 percent contribution to the Thrift Plan whether or not they contributed, they would say, "Oh, my God, that's wonderful!"

MR. SMALL. Is it more demanding to work at the Board?

MS. LOW. You have to show that you take pride in your work, so that the work product you ultimately put out is of the high standards and the quality that the Board requires. Past employees felt that they could get away with anything at the other places that they were employed. Nobody fine-tooth-combed anything to make sure that all the T's were crossed and I's were dotted. I was told that letters would go out with misspelling in them. The Board would never tolerate anything like that. The quality control at the Board was high as reflected in the

satisfaction of a job well done. They stated that, at the Board, that would never be acceptable. I probably couldn't function in another agency where that was allowed, because I'm accustomed to producing high-quality work.

Like I said, the Board strives to make its employees feel that they're cared for. I've known people that have left here, things didn't work out, and the Board rehired them a couple of times. I'm not sure you could do that everywhere. That's another reason why, I guess, I stayed so long, even though I feel that I probably could have gotten higher positions other places. It's because I knew the Board was a good place. It has its challenges. And being an African American would have been a challenge anywhere. That's just how the world was working. But, all in all, the reason I stayed at the Board is because I was comfortable.

MR. SMALL. So you might have some questions about work or opportunities you didn't have, but you have a lot of pride in the quality of what you, in fact, did.

MS. LOW. Yes. My pastor's father worked here many years ago. I served on the finance committee at my church. When we met for the first meeting, I walked in, and there was my pastor and four white guys. I said, "I'm sorry. I think I'm in the wrong room." [Laughter] My pastor said, "No, you're not. Come on in, here's your seat." I thought, "Oh, my God, what is going on here?" He asked me where I worked, and I said, "The Federal Reserve." He said, "My father worked at the Federal Reserve! He was an accountant." He had good feelings about the Fed because he knew about it.

A lot of people didn't know about the Fed, especially in my circle. When I first came here, people would ask me where I worked. They would say, "What is the Federal Reserve?" And some would say, "Oh, you all make the money!" And I'd say [laughter], "No, we don't make any money. We regulate how much money is made." I tried to explain that. But I always

shied away from telling them exactly what I do, because I didn't want to get into discussions about the interest rates. In my world, everybody wants low interest rates. They don't understand when the rates go up, and I don't want to get into that with them.

Even in my classes, you go around and introduce yourself and tell people where you work and your position. As soon as I would say I work at the Federal Reserve, it goes, "Oh"—and I had to lug in 20 *Purposes and Functions* books one time for my class. [Laughter] I would just tell them I was not at liberty to talk about my position. My daughter doesn't even know what I basically do. She knows that I work around the Chairman, and I see the Chairman all the time, but I shy away from telling people, because I don't want to say something that will cost me my job! [Laughter] Now, maybe, I can say, "Let me tell you what *really* goes on behind those closed doors!"

MR. SMALL. With a five-year lag.

MS. LOW. [Laughter] Am I going to be barred from saying anything for five years?

MR. SMALL. Anything within the last five years is confidential.

MS. LOW. But I thought that was only for professionals.

MR. SMALL. That might be. You'll get an ethics debriefing.

MS. LOW. Yes, I'll be able to spill my guts, so to speak. [Laughter] I don't have any regrets working at the Board. My regrets are staying in the Secretariat too long without having an avenue to further my career. I should've moved around to other positions, but I think it's easier said than done about moving around. Everybody knows me. All the Reserve Bank people know me.

I remember one time when Gary Stern was still with us. He would always eat in the Board cafeteria instead of going to the dining rooms. I would go upstairs, and he would say,

“Hey, Carol!” Some of my co-workers would turn around, like, “What’s up with that?” They would say, “Who is that?” And I would say, “That’s the Minneapolis Federal Reserve president.” “You know him?” And I’d say, “Yes, I know him.” Little perks like that, because I worked in the FOMC Secretariat.

One of my co-workers’ daughter worked here as an intern one summer in one of the research divisions or the International Finance Division. She told her mother, “In the office where I was, if they heard that it was Carol Low, everybody jumped!” [Laughter] “Carol Low wants so and so. We have to get it to her ASAP!” Those kinds of things make you smile. I do regret not being able to do more substantive work at the Board. But I’ve done enough in 41 years. I’m going to call it quits.

MR. SMALL. Now you’ll have a chance to spread your wings. Well, at least you’ll look back with pride on what you did do—that the work was done well and in an institution that had high-quality standards.

MS. LOW. Yes. I work on a lot of committees for my church, and I carry those high-quality standards with me. Hopefully, I will continue to do that.

MR. SMALL. So it sounds like you would recommend today that a young Carol Low apply for a job at the Board, but you’d have a few words of wisdom.

MS. LOW. I would recommend the Board to anybody, because I think it’s a fantastic place to work. But, like I said, you’d have to take the initiative to promote your career goals. I feel people starting at the Board today would not have that problem, because the people I see coming in now are aggressive and know what they want. Back in my day, starting right out of high school with no experience, I didn’t realized what I had to do to make that happen.

MR. SMALL. If someone said that, by the time you're this age, you'll have a master's degree, you'd have said, "That's not possible"?

MS. LOW. Right, exactly. I think young people entering the workforce today make their career goals known and aggressively go about seeking them. I would go out on a limb and say that loyalty and dedication is secondary to achieving career goals today.

MR. SMALL. The old people were saying that about us when we were young kids.

[Laughter]

MS. LOW. Yes. I used to always be the youngest person in the office, and now I'm the oldest. [Laughter] It's a change. They've done some great things. I just wish I could've participated more. But it didn't happen that way.

MR. SMALL. You're going to have some very significant people saying nice things about you at your going-away lunch. That's my forecast.

MS. LOW. [Laughter] It's only going to be the office here! I don't want any speeches. I wanted to go out quietly, but they broke me down. [Laughter] Kim broke me down: "We've got to do this!"