

The University of New Mexico  
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Oral History Project

**Interview with Larry J. Gordon, MS, MPH**

March 16, 1999 et seq.

Albuquerque, New Mexico

This is an interview with Larry J. Gordon, presently retired from state government and residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico where he is an Adjunct Professor at the University of New Mexico. Mr. Gordon has enjoyed one of the most distinguished careers in public health in contemporary New Mexico. He joined the New Mexico Department of Public Health as a sanitarian in Grant County, New Mexico in 1950 and worked in the field of public health continuously until his retirement in 1988 as New Mexico's Cabinet Secretary for Health & Environment. He has been Director of the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, was President of the American Public Health Association in 1982, and has filled virtually every position of leadership within both the Albuquerque and the state public health departments at one time or another in his distinguished career. This interview was begun on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1999 and continued over four subsequent sessions. It was finally completed in June of 1999. I, the interviewer, am Professor Jake Spidle of the UNM Department of History.

**SPIDLE:** Regarding the technical details of this interview process: a rough transcript of this interview will be prepared and given to me for review and corrections. You will then receive a copy for your own review, making necessary spelling corrections, etc. and editorial changes as you see fit. Following those reviews, a final, archival copy will become the official record of the interview, and will be available for researchers and scholars in the future.

Just before we met this morning, Archives Manager Janet Johnson handed me this copy of your work, Environmental Health and Protection Adventures, and obviously I need to read this to fill in gaps or develop questions to pursue in our future sessions. That will be my homework prior to our next meeting.

**GORDON:** I took a copy of that and my resume and some articles and left them for you with a secretary at your department office a year or more ago.

**SPIDLE:** Looking at your vitae here, you're clearly not an average public health staff member in terms of your New Mexico activities, let alone having been President of the American Public Health Association. Your accomplishments make it obvious that you've been involved in essential public health issues and developments at a national level in addition to keeping the state's public health apparatus on the cutting edge. So, I want to interview you as a New Mexico public health figure, but at some point in the process, also, I'd like to address your national connections and service. Some graduate student may want to look at what you say about the development of environmental health in New Mexico in the 60's, but somebody in Connecticut may want to know about Larry Gordon, who was a major figure in the APHA.

I've already said that I anticipate this interview may take two or three sessions, so let's begin with a basic personal background: when and where you were born, what kind of family you grew up in, and so on.

**GORDON:** I was born in Tipton, Oklahoma in 1926, the second child of Andrew and Dewylee Stewart Gordon, who had variously been farmers, ranchers and schoolteachers. They both attended the University of Oklahoma and Texas Tech University, and came to New Mexico about 1928. They came here because they applied to schools and were hired at McGaffey, which was a school near Gallup, part of the county system there. The reason they chose that isolated location on top of the Zuni Mountain was because the school started earlier, and they could start getting paid earlier. When they arrived in Gallup, they had to borrow money from banker Glenn Emmons to buy groceries.

They taught school for a while. My father returned to the University of New Mexico and subsequently became an employee of the US Forest Service at Tijeras, later the Bureau of Indian Affairs and then the Soil Erosion Service, which was later termed the Soil Conservation Service. He worked for that Service and the Bureau of Land Management for many years, and then from the Army Corps of Engineers. His primary field was in range management and conservation.

In 1946, my parents became the first Ranch Managers of the New Mexico Boys Ranch and later resigned following a policy disagreement. They did some farming for a while, and in later years were successful with real estate interests. Both have passed away.

My brother, Ladd, and I had parallel careers. We both attended the University of New Mexico, and we both served in the Navy Hospital Corps as pharmacist's mates. Following graduation from UNM in 1949, Ladd went to work for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish as an entry grade patrolman. He became superintendent of the bird farm at Carlsbad, was a wildlife biologist in the Gila Wilderness Area, became Chief of Information and Education for the Game and Fish Department in Santa Fe, and later Chief of Law Enforcement for the Department in Santa Fe. He was then appointed Director and served in that position for seventeen years, possibly the longest-running appointee in that position, except for Elliott Barker. Mr. Barker was a fine gentleman who lived to the age of 101 or so.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, I think he held that post some thirty years.

**GORDON:** Then my brother worked for the National Rifle Association for a while, subsequently retired following a number of years with Ducks Unlimited. He passed away prematurely from the toxic effects of tobacco at age 67. He had an illustrious career and a national reputation.

**SPIDLE:** Yes. When I saw his name in your manuscript, I recognized his name and knew who he was as a state official. It's interesting that there's such a pattern of public service in the family a generation before you and your brother became state employees, and that there's an early environmentalism evident. I don't think that term was even in use at that time, though.

**GORDON:** It was not a term of common usage. I suppose the closest to it was conservation, which isn't the same.

**SPIDLE:** So you were reared in various parts of the state, weren't you?

**GORDON:** I think I went to fifteen different schools in New Mexico and southern Arizona. They included McGaffey; a little place called Guam that no longer exists. Guam was an AT&SF station for section hands where the laborers lived, and their children attended the school. Coolidge, a trading post, was the nearest post office. And subsequently such schools as Magdalena, Tijeras, Five Points, Stronghurst, Eugene Field, and schools in Las Cruces and Roswell. I also attended Safford High School and Gila Junior College in Arizona, the University of New Mexico, the University of Oklahoma, and the University Of Michigan School Of Public Health.

**SPIDLE:** What were the dates you were at these schools, do you recall?

**GORDON:** I commenced attending Gila Junior College prior to graduating from high school, because World War II was raging and I was eager to get some college education. Safford High School awarded me a diploma in 1943. Then I was at UNM for a while one or two semesters. I then transferred to the University of Oklahoma bearing in mind they had three semesters a year during the war years; then back to UNM in 1944, where I joined the Navy and served as a Pharmacist's Mate for almost two years. I was discharged on July 4, 1946. My brother was discharged in March 1946, and both of us returned to UNM in the fall of 1946. I included some news clippings about my brother along with information on my own career which I gave to the Medical History Library.

**SPIDLE:** Are you a UNM alumnus?

**GORDON:** Yes. I earned my .S. and M.S. here; the first in 1949, the second in '51. In 1953 I was sitting in the office of New Mexico State Health Officer Dr. James R. Scott one morning --- he was very fond of his environmental-type employees; he called us his boys. He looked around the room and said, Now Charlie Caldwell here (the director of the Division of Sanitary Engineering) has his MPH from the University of North Carolina, and Carl Henderson has a master's from the University of Missouri, and Carl Jensen here has a master's degree in Industrial Hygiene from Georgia Tech, and Jim Doughty here has a master's degree in Public Health from the University of California School of Public Health at Berkeley, and Larry, what do you have? Well, Doctor, I have a master's degree in Biology. He looked at me and said, Son, we got to get you off to school! (Both laugh)

They allowed me to choose the school of public health, so they sent me off to the University of Michigan, a very prestigious school at that time, and I earned my MPH there in 1954 and had the highest academic rating in my class.

**SPIDLE:** How interesting that when I ask where you were raised, it was all over the state. Think of the future relevance of that experience, when you knew personally so many corners of New Mexico. You actually started, in the tradition of your parents, as a high school teacher; where was that?

**GORDON:** At La Joya; the school no longer exists. It was an independent school district east of the river, south of Belen. My folks owned land near there a farm and ranch -- and that's the reason I happened to apply there. Just as trivia, perhaps:

the whole complex of Game Department reserves Casa Colorado, Bernardo and La Joya have been subsumed as the Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Management Complex.'

**SPIDLE:** Oh, I didn't know that! I gather you decided rather soon that you didn't want to continue as a teacher.

**GORDON:** I wasn't really trained to be a teacher. It was a job that I was glad to have, but somewhere I'd seen a notice of an opening for a sanitarian. I didn't know what that was, but the notice said you had to have a degree in science and own a car. I met those requirements. My then-fiancée, Nedra Callender, also had a degree in science, but didn't have a car, so she couldn't qualify. I applied and was hired by the Seventh District Health Department, with headquarters in Silver City. Fortunately I had a great boss, John C. Mitchell, who was what today would be called an MD/MPH. In those days it was a CPH,' meaning a Certificate of Public Health; his was from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. I was fortunate to work for him, as he was a good mentor.

**SPIDLE:** So he was a professional public health man, as opposed to a local doctor who?

**GORDON:** New Mexico hasn't had many of that type -- many states have where a retired physician feels qualified for a public health position. We have had, for the most part, District Health Officers who are actually trained in public health.

**SPIDLE:** This man clearly fits that mold, although I don't recognize his name. How long was he there?

**GORDON:** He went there in the mid 30's and retired in the 60's. He probably had 30 years service at least. At that time, New Mexico had ten health districts; we now have six. Every one of the District Health Officers at that time had public health training.

**SPIDLE:** Do you know the name J. Roslyn Earp?

**GORDON:** Yes, I know the name, but never met him. He was apparently considered a giant in public health. Another was Godfrey. I've always had an institutional interest in public health history, and I used to listen to Dr. Mitchell telling stories. I later learned from Myrtle Greenfield and Carl Henderson. I thought the history was important, so I paid attention to them.

**SPIDLE:** They are important, and it's only through people like you that we can get a real feel for that history. I want to come back and ask you about some of these people later, but right now let's stay with you and your career. You went to Silver City, where you were interviewed; was that one-on-one?

**GORDON:** Actually, Dr. Mitchell came by our farmhouse one night at La Joya to interview me. Sanitarians were not specifically trained in those days; they just had to a brief period of in-service training with somebody else, and they had to have a degree in science. I worked out of the Seventh District Health Office in Silver City about two years.

**SPIDLE:** What were the facilities like there, at that time?

**GORDON:** The district office, as was typical of health offices in those days, was in the basement of the courthouse, literally under the sewer pipes. (Spidle chuckles) It didn't bother me; I thought it was fine! I'm just telling you that's the way it was. I was pleased to have a job at \$225 a month plus six cents a mile for my car. When I was married in August of the year I went to Silver City that was May or June of 1950 Dr. Mitchell also hired my wife, Nedra, to analyze all the water and food and milk samples for that district because that was before we'd set up a transportation system, and we had no air service to fly the samples in to the state laboratory in Albuquerque.

**SPIDLE:** So those tests were done on the spot.

**GORDON:** Yes. And they were analyzed professionally in accordance with Standard Methods. My wife not only had her degree, technically in Biology, but actually in Microbiology, came to Albuquerque and trained with Myrtle Greenfield at the State Public Health Laboratory for several weeks before she started analyzing samples.

**SPIDLE:** In the basement of the courthouse. How many rooms? Three or four?

**GORDON:** There were about three rooms. Dr. Mitchell had an office, then there was a small room where the laboratory was, plus a couple of desks; one desk was mine and the other a reception area where the secretary and the public health nurse had desks. I was pretty naïve in those days, but I stopped one Saturday and discovered that frequently on Saturday mornings Dr. Mitchell gave physicals to the ladies from Hudson Street. I don't suppose you know about Hudson Street, but Silver City was, and is, a mining town, and Hudson Street was the red light district. When we'd have guests from out of town, we would often drive them over to see Hudson Street.

**SPIDLE:** So this was good preventive medicine he was practicing, eh? (laughing)

**GORDON:** I don't know if this was doing this on his own as a practitioner or as a public health officer. I never asked him. I suspect it was on his own.

**SPIDLE:** You've just made my point: where else would we be able to get a description of what District Seven's health office was like in 1950, except by talking to someone like you who was there.

What kind of staff was there? There was the doctor, himself; you

**GORDON:** New Mexico was very forward-looking. I'd have to check Miss Greenfield's book; I should know this. As I recall, there was a Dr. Carl Buck who did a survey for the American Public Health Association, and found that New Mexico was one of the first states to offer full-time public health services statewide. When I studied at the University of Michigan School of Public Health in the mid-50s, there were many states that still were not offering full-time public health services.

To return to your question, as early as 1935, New Mexico Statutes required that every health district, at a minimum, have a District Health Officer, a public health nurse and a sanitarian. Some districts had additional personnel. Such staffing was available in New Mexico earlier than a number of other states. The Seventh District had a health officer (a physician); a part-time clinician (Dr. Kaufman (sp?) a retired Tyrone physician who held clinics); I remember one public health nurse, Elizabeth Thorne, one clerk and myself in the Grant County office. There was also an office in Deming, part of District Seven, with a public health nurse, a clerk and a sanitarian. Lordsburg, also in District Seven, was serviced out of Silver City.

**SPIDLE:** So, in those two offices, there were probably a total of ten people for an area the size of Connecticut or so. What, specifically, were your job responsibilities as sanitarian?

**GORDON:** I think anyone who started out as a sanitarian in that era was fortunate in having broad responsibilities. I had responsibilities ranging from industrial hygiene at Kennecott, to food protection, milk sanitation we had a lot of dairies in those days. Solid waste disposal. Sewage treatment. Water supplies. Insect and rodent control. We did it all. I gained experience that helped me throughout my career.

**SPIDLE:** Sure! This gave you very wide exposure in public health, and you were learning by doing.

**GORDON:** To a large degree, yes.

**SPIDLE:** You got the basic science training, but the real special expertise in public health came a bit later. How did you, as a very young man, deal authoritatively with Kennecott Copper?

**GORDON:** It wasn't difficult. Of course, maybe we weren't doing the things that were later controversial. The major issues tailings disposal and air pollution and such we didn't have authority in those days. I later got state laws enacted for those and other environmental health issues such as Occupational Health and Safety.

**SPIDLE:** You didn't have big sticks to hold over their heads at that time.

**GORDON:** No. There weren't many environmental health laws in those days, just state board of health regulations. They were enforceable, but they were not as broad and effective later statutes.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, I'm asking questions from a 1990's perspective, whereas in the 1950's environmental concerns weren't as much in the public consciousness.

**GORDON:** That's right. The beginnings of the environmental movement were largely coincidental with Earth Day, which we'll get to later.

**SPIDLE:** our first tenure in New Mexico public health, then, began in Silver City.

**GORDON:** Yes, and about a year later I was invited to apply for a promotion to the state office in Santa Fe, where I became State Food Sanitarian' under Carl Henderson, who was the Supervisor of Food Sanitation. I was also responsible for training all the new employees state wide, not just in food sanitation, but in everything involving environmental health at that time. In effect, I also became the training officer for the division of what was then called Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation. Charles Caldwell was the director of the division, and there were a number of other supervisors in the division.

**SPIDLE:** So that position was more administrative, as opposed to hands-on.

**GORDON:** It was both. I did field work with personnel; I did quality control, and I trained every field person who was hired. Those were enjoyable years.

**SPIDLE:** This was still was part of the basic learning, via doing, of public health.

**GORDON:** In 1953, Dr. Scott suggested I return to school, and I attended the University of Michigan School of Public Health and earned my Master of Public Health degree. I had been told that when I returned I would be promoted, but that did not occur. I found myself doing the same things, and became frustrated. About that time, in 1955, I was asked if I would be interested in being the Chief Sanitarian for what was then called the Albuquerque Health Department, and I accepted the position at a significant salary increase. When I announced to Charlie Caldwell that I was leaving -- I thought the world of Charlie, by the way; he was an excellent sanitary engineer. Charlie looked at me and said, Why are you leaving? I told him that, for one thing, they were going to pay me a good deal more, and I told him what the figures were. He said, Well, we could've matched that. I said, Well, why didn't you say so yesterday? It was well that I accepted the position in Albuquerque, however.

When I came to Albuquerque I was treated well, but I found that I was the only person in the department, and one of the few in the state, who had any public health training; certainly I was the only one in Albuquerque, including the Indian Health Service or anyone else around. So it was professionally lonely. I don't think anyone else in the city's health department even had a degree.

It took me a while to start observing that the director, every day, came in and a lot of the staff would go over to the old Hilton Hotel now La Posada and drink coffee and talk about the wrestling matches the night before on television, and then the director would go back to his laundry, and another employee would go to his dog kennels, and another to his farm in Los Lunas, and I was left alone. And some of these so-called sanitarians and I use the title loosely in this case; they only had it as a job title would go out in the daytime and make inspections and collect inspection fees which never got to the city treasury.

Then, they'd recommend some piece of equipment or, I remember, one practice was to recommend lindane vaporizers to control insects. The vaporizers were later made illegal. They would return at night and sell the equipment or the vaporizers! Between 8:00 and 5:00 they'd recommend the item, and come back in the evening to make the sale.

This was not at all unusual. Albuquerque had the lowest food protection rating, by a US Public Health Service rating method we, in the state and possibly, the country. So I asked the Director if we could at least ask employees to return to the office by 5:00; at least to check in. And he said, Well, I don't want them to do anything I don't want to do. So I started training sessions, and devoted all day Fridays to training staff. I had guest speakers, I gave lectures and used training films, and it made most of the staff so mad they resigned. (Spidle laughs) I started hiring people with degrees in science. One employee who did not resign this was quite a bit later I looked out my office window one morning and saw Pat Haney down in the parking lot roaring of his city the engine vehicle, and I knew he was already drunk. So a very excellent employee that I had hired, Peter Griego, and I got in Peter's personal car and followed Haney all day; he was a milk sanitarian. We followed him to Belen and he did nothing but go in a restaurant and have lunch. When he returned to the office I called him in, told him what I had observed, and said, Pat, do you want to resign or shall I just fire you? He said, Oh, you son of a bitch, I'll just resign. So we got rid of the last incompetent that way. That was after I had been forced to get rid of my own boss, which I don't recommend. His name was Wayne Stell, and I had finally appealed the things that were happening to the City Manager for action. I was subsequently appointed director of the department.

**SPIDLE:** This was called the Albuquerque Health Department?

**GORDON:** At that point it was called the Albuquerque Health Department, which was somewhat a misnomer because most of the programs were environmental health. That was not unusual for early-day health departments. We changed the name of it much later. In 1961 I developed and gained enactment of the New Mexico Municipal Health Act that specifies the jurisdiction, standards, responsibilities and authority for municipal health departments, and it's still in use. It specifies that the department director must have a master's degree in public health from a school of public health accredited by the American Public Health Association. A year or two later, I developed and gained approval of a joint powers agreement, approved by the City Commission, the County Commission, the State Board of Finance, and the State Board of Health that changed the name of the Albuquerque Health Department to the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department, and changed that of the county's department to Department of Preventive Medicine and Personal Health.

The City operation is still known as the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department. Later, the County opted out of the joint powers agreement, and now both the City and County have Environmental Health Departments.

**SPIDLE:** It sounds as though the Albuquerque Health Department was purely political patronage.

**GORDON:** Yes, it was created in the days of Mayor Clyde Tingley because, as I heard it, he didn't think the state health department was providing suitable supervision to the dozens, if not hundreds, of dairy farms existing in the Albuquerque area in those days. The department began very narrowly with milk sanitation, a meat inspection program, and food sanitation, but most of the department's employees were political hires and had no training or degrees. I was told that during the election season they'd just disappear, busy with political duties.

**SPIDLE:** Am I perceiving correctly that there are three health entities here? There's the Albuquerque, the Bernalillo County. What about the District Health Office?

**GORDON:** The city functions on environmental health are handled by the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department; county environmental health functions are handled by the Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department. The District doesn't become involved with environmental health matters in this area.

**SPIDLE:** So what the District Health Office is doing is vaccinations and that sort of thing, but not environmental health.

**GORDON:** That's correct. The Albuquerque Environmental Health Department also has several County functions by virtue of agreements with the County. For example, the City handles the entire city-county air pollution program, the plague surveillance program, the insect and rodent control program, but there is also a County Environmental Health Department that performs a number of environmental health functions. It's not unusual; we don't have clear-cut governmental entities in this country. If I were playing god for a day, I would create another comprehensive city-county environmental health department, as I did in the 60's.

**SPIDLE:** It would be rationalized. (laughs)

**GORDON:** Well, of course.

**SPIDLE:** One thing that occurs to me is that you rather slid into public health; it wasn't a career choice. What was it that attracted you? That you realized what sanitarians and others were doing was important?

**GORDON:** I always enjoyed my work. I probably enjoyed it more in those early days than I did later on; it seems strange to say, even though I became New Mexico Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment. I enjoyed it and never gave serious thought to leaving. It's not what I was originally trained for. I really planned on a career in conservation, range management, or wildlife management. My brother and I both applied for federal refuge managers' jobs, and we both rated very high on the tests. We thought we were both going to get those jobs, but were told that since our degrees weren't in wildlife management, we didn't qualify. It's funny, especially in my brother's case, that he couldn't qualify for refuge manager but became Director of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish!

**SPIDLE:** When you came to Albuquerque in 1955, you'd been to school here, so you probably weren't entering alien territory, but were doubtless conversant with some of the political heavyweights.

**GORDON:** I either knew them or knew of them.

**SPIDLE:** Because it seems to me that, although there was a technical dimension, the political dimension was always important.

**GORDON:** There's always a political dimension in anything in government. I sometimes have trouble accepting that, but that's how you get things done. Everything happens through the city council, the state legislature, the congress.

**SPIDLE:** So while you were developing a technical expertise, you were also beginning to develop that other awareness.

**GORDON:** I'm proud that in everything I did, I never took polls, so to speak. No one ever told me we needed an Albuquerque Environmental Health Department or, later on, one of the things I was proudest of: creating and directing the New Mexico Scientific Laboratory. Or creating the Environmental Improvement Agency or the State Health Agency or playing a role in creating the Department of Health and Environment. A lot of these steps were very controversial; there was no ground swell to get an Air Pollution Control Act passed or the Water Pollution Act, or Occupational Health and Safety, or the City

Environmental Health Code. There was no public sentiment regarding these innovations. You just do these things and hope for public and political support.

And I lost a lot of them, too! I had some awfully good ideas that never went anywhere. (laughs) These were things that, as a professional, I thought needed to be done, and I did them. Some worked and some didn't.

**SPIDLE:** Coming to Albuquerque after your public health training in Michigan, you were isolated to a large extent. How did you keep up what was going on in this very technical field you'd entered?

**GORDON:** The City was good to me in allowing me to attend and participate in national conferences. I started getting involved in the American Public Health Association and the National Environmental Health Association; the Conference of Local Environmental Health Administrators; the Association of Food and Drug Officials of the U.S. All these groups have journals or newsletters, so I didn't find it difficult to keep current. In fact, we were ahead in many areas.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, that's what strikes me as unusual about New Mexico. Poor and way off at the edge of things, and yet I get the sense that in public health, at least, it's always been somewhat a leader!

**GORDON:** I think that's true. Albuquerque was one of the first cities in the nation, believe it or not, to get a very good air pollution ordinance passed that I proposed back in the 1950's. I should say, at the outset, that obviously I talk a lot about environmental health, because I've been more deeply involved in that than some other aspects of public health, although I was involved in those too. But environmental health is half of the field of public health in terms of expenditures and numbers of personnel. It's larger than any other single component of the field of public health, and is largest single component of the field of public health.

**SPIDLE:** Now.

**GORDON:** Now. And I think it probably always has been. In the early days you'd have one sanitarian and one public health nurse. If you look at the objectives of the American Public Health Association when it was formed some 125 years ago, they were to promote personal and environmental health.

**SPIDLE:** And you probably touch more lives by cleaning up the water, or milk, than.

**GORDON:** You touch all lives, every one, and I think many other aspects of public health do too. Many other aspects of public health practice such as dental health, maternal and child health, nutrition and immunizations are really aimed at specific groups.

**SPIDLE:** I think the point you made about half the budget and half the personnel is critically important; I wouldn't have guessed that proportion.

**GORDON:** One must analyze all the figures to determine what belongs in what category. What happens in the U.S. Public Health Service is not all public health; what happens in schools of public health is not all public health. Some is, but a lot is health care, and there is a difference. So you go through the figures and determine what part really is public health.

**SPIDLE:** I'd like us to discuss at more length in our next meeting the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department. For the rest of this session, please tell me about Dr. James Scott, Myrtle Greenfield, Jim Doughty, the structure of the New Mexico public health apparatus in the late 40's and 50's.

**GORDON:** Probably the main structure was having a state health director, a Laboratory Division, a Division of Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation (now termed the New Mexico Environment Department), and the Division of Nursing. There were, obviously, some support functions such as Finance, Purchasing, etc. Most of the programs, though, were delivered by public health nurses, sanitarians and engineers. Is that what you're asking about?

**SPIDLE:** Yes. Let's talk about the laboratory. It was physically on the UNM campus at that time.

**GORDON:** It still is. Myrtle Greenfield, of course, had been the only director. As I recall, the public health laboratory was established in 1919 one of the earliest things the first State Board of Health did. About the same time, the Board created a Division of Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation. Myrtle Greenfield stayed there until the mid-50s. I later had her appointed to my Albuquerque City Health Advisory Board. She was a task mistress. She ran her laboratory with an iron fist, did it right, and insisted on quality results in the entire operation.

**SPIDLE:** I got some testimony about her from Carl Henderson. I think he cut his teeth as a diener in that laboratory. But it was still a small operation.

**GORDON:** Well, it was a small state! And there was a small staff, compared to what we have today. I think it met the needs we had at that time.

**SPIDLE:** When you came back from your public health graduate work in Ann Arbor, did you feel as though you were going back into the country, or did you feel it was comparable to what was going on in other states?

**GORDON:** I had a couple of weeks of field work while at the University of Michigan and visited some Michigan counties, and I had no reason to think we weren't doing things as well here as there.

**SPIDLE:** What about the constraints of money?

**GORDON:** Every state has financial constraints, and I think, considering our needs and problems at that time, we were able to address needs. You know, we've gotten to the point where we're almost over killing in some areas. We're spending huge amounts of money now to solve problems that have only small public health impact. In those days, when Charlie Caldwell gained enactment of the Mutual Domestic Water Supply Act in the late 40's, the death rate from dysentery and diarrhea started decreasing rapidly. It saved lives. It wasn't just, What are we going to do about radon? or something else that gets people alarmed without conclusive scientific evidence to support the alarm.

**SPIDLE:** In terms of bang for the buck.

**GORDON:** The safe water problem is still a concern. But providing safe drinking water to people in the rural areas of New Mexico so they no longer had to obtain drinking water from *acequias*, was a major step in public health protection.

**SPIDLE:** I'd like to ask a couple more questions about the laboratory. Given a small laboratory with a small staff in a small state with a small population, but with decently trained people and functioning well.

**GORDON:** I think we got the service, in quantity and quality, that we needed at that time for the scope of our services, noting, again, that was before I got the New Mexico Air Pollution Control Act passed, and the Water Quality Act, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, let alone getting into radionuclide analyses. These statutes all required additional laboratory support. But while Miss Greenfield was there, I never had any concerns about the quantity or quality of services from the lab. We did have the problem I mentioned before, of small labs in outlying communities like Silver City. It took a few years to develop transportation systems for sending samples to the public health laboratory so that we did not need those local labs; everything started coming in to the central laboratory.

After Miss Greenfield retired, the state established branch labs in Farmington and Clovis. I think the Clovis lab has closed, but there's still one in Farmington.

**SPIDLE:** One last question, about Myrtle Greenfield herself. I have an image in my mind of a stereotypical spinster whose life is her laboratory. Is that anywhere near reality?

**GORDON:** Very much so. She was a very serious person who didn't suffer fools gladly; who put down anyone who crossed her. I thought the world of her; I thought she was a great lady.

**SPIDLE:** It's interesting, because she was a couple of generations ahead of women as administrators.

**GORDON:** I've been told, and I've never researched this, that in some role she was in she had a lot to do with the creation of Centers for Disease Control. I do not know that for a fact.

**SPIDLE:** So, she wasn't meek and mild; even though she was way ahead of most women in heading up such an enterprise.

**GORDON:** Not meek and mild, no.

**SPIDLE:** That's interesting, and I appreciate the information. I'm going to go back and read what Carl Henderson said about her, because he worked in her laboratory and told me tales which today are horrifying: about dogs' heads for rabies analysis being sent in wrapped in paper bags and transported by Greyhound buses! Was that era beginning to fade?

**GORDON:** es. Carl told me that sometimes the duties of the sanitarian were ill-defined. Carl was a sanitary engineer, but sometimes his duties were to paint the health offices or to cut off dogs' heads, etc.

**SPIDLE:** The state laboratory, an essential part of the state health effort, was up to snuff' in your estimation, then.

**GORDON:** In those years. I started to perceive problems after Miss Greenfield left. You know, when you respect someone a great deal, you don't call them by their first name, and no one ever called Miss Greenfield, Myrtle; she was always Miss Greenfield.

**SPIDLE:** Did she turn over authority gracefully when she retired?

**GORDON:** Yes, I think she did. She had hired Dan Johnson, who functioned as deputy director prior to her retirement. I think it was about that time that she began preparing her book, *A History of Public Health in New Mexico*. I doubt that she worked on it earlier.

**SPIDLE:** Let me ask about a couple of other divisions of state health. We're not talking now of things you did, but using you as a witness to what public health nursing, for example, was like at the time you returned from professional training.

**GORDON:** There were very well qualified, dedicated public health nurses. To my knowledge, then and now, most of them were trained in public health nursing. When I was first transferred into the state office in Santa Fe in 1951, the Director of Public Health Nursing was Portia Irick, and she ran a good shop, too, and a number of consultants in her office worked with public health nursing staff throughout the state. The ones I knew were very professional.

**SPIDLE:** What about the sanitation programs?

**GORDON:** In those days it was called the Division of Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation, and I'll reiterate about Charlie Caldwell. He had worked with Dr. Mitchell in Silver City, then went in the Army as a sanitary engineer, and returned in 1946. I think he was appointed director of that division at that time. As a sanitary engineer, his prime interests were water and sewage, but he was very good and very supportive in all the areas covered by the division. He had Carl Henderson who had also been a sanitarian in Eddy County, and Jim Doughty (originally a sanitarian in Quay County) in charge of the milk sanitation program, which was very important in those days; milk, historically, had been a major problem as a source of disease.

Carl Jensen, who had a master's degree from Georgia Tech, was in charge of what was largely a voluntary industrial hygiene program, but he accomplished a lot through persuasion. Industrial hygiene regulations were very weak. Later, in the '50's, Robert P. Lowe, a graduate sanitary engineer from the University Of California School Of Public Health, was in charge of the sewage program; I think we called it liquid waste' then. Another graduate sanitary engineer, named R. C. Steele, was a graduate of the University Of North Carolina School Of Public Health. They were all very top level people, all professionally qualified.

**SPIDLE:** It sounds as though this was a purely professional agency, the nasty hand of politics not intruding. You weren't told to hire someone because his uncle could deliver such-and-such county.

**GORDON:** I was told that stopped with the passage of the federal Social Security Act. I'm not sure all this ties together; it was before my time. But I think it's true, that health departments and welfare departments, in order to obtain federal money, were required to have a state merit system. So if there were any infringements, except for the directors who are always appointed by the governor or the Board of Health, I wasn't aware of it.

**SPIDLE:** In local departments, though, such as Albuquerque, it was clearly a political entity.

**GORDON:** Completely. But at that time, Albuquerque's health department wasn't a part of the state agency. I don't know how they ever hired me, or why Mayor Ken Schultz ever kept me at a much later date!

**SPIDLE:** Tell me about James R. Scott. You must have known Beatrice Chauvenet. I'll never forget the phrase she used about Dr. Scott. She felt he was professionally strong, but petticoat ridden. (laughs) You didn't see that dimension of him. Did he hire you?

**GORDON:** He may have had to approve my hiring, but Dr. Mitchell hired me for my first job in the department. The second job was a promotion by Carl Henderson. But it was Dr. Scott who sent me off to Michigan for an MPH, which I've always been grateful for, because that graduate degree in public health was, for me, the keys to the kingdom.

**SPIDLE:** Although, I hear from your testimony, that virtually all of the administrative heads already had solid training.

**GORDON:** Something similar to an MPH. If not an MPH, a master's degree in Sanitary Engineering or in Public Health Nursing.

**SPIDLE:** In retrospect, then, there are no apologies to be made for the New Mexico Department of Public Health in its personnel and programs as of the 1940's.

**GORDON:** No. I was privileged to work there; it was a foundation that served me well.

**GORDON:** Carl Henderson also knew Dr. Puckett, the Public Health Officer based in the Carlsbad area. Carl probably told you that Dr. Puckett was a pioneering public health physician who even wrote a sanitation textbook for use in the public schools. It was titled Sanitation Plus.

**SPIDLE:** I was just reading about his diagnoses of undulant fever. I have also been reading your autobiography, Environmental Health and Protection Adventures, and plan to use it as a springboard to our discussions. I find any number of interesting points in it.

**GORDON:** I originally wrote that for my family, but the more I developed it, the more I thought I'd make additional copies. I've thought about improving it with an eye towards publication.

**SPIDLE:** From what I've read so far, I would say it certainly merits publication. What especially interests me is that your career coincides with a critically important period in the development of modern public health. And you weren't a bystander, but very involved in that development, which makes your testimony of real value in this interview process. The whole modern concern with environmental protection was begun by public health people starting to deal with related issues at the turn of this century.

**GORDON:** They called it sanitation, but it has enlarged in scope, and the term sanitation as used today is rather narrow and confining.

**SPIDLE:** I want to show you one more thing before we begin: you make a passing reference to [Dr.] Marion Hotopp a little brush with' Marion Hotopp, a disagreement on policy.

**GORDON** (amused): Yes. She wasn't my favorite person.

**SPIDLE:** I'd like you to take with you this from *Doctors of Medicine in New Mexico*, which I wrote in the 80's. I naturally included a chapter on women physicians, and I think a really perceptive reader, at the end of the chapter, might say, Women really [did' or didn't?'] play a major role in [sic].

**GORDON:** There was one who became the first woman commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service; I'll think of her name

**SPIDLE:** Here's her picture Evelyn Fisher Frisbie, who was president [of the New Mexico Medical Society] in 1913 [wasn't it 1915-16? J.]

**GORDON:** Actually I knew her better after she left the U.S. Public Health Service and returned to Albuquerque. I don't think it was Dr. Frisbie; it was Dr. Estelle Ford Warner. Estella Ford Warner was commissioned in the PHS Regular Corps in 1932, quite some time before the Corps was opened to Nurses in 1944 and when a large group of women entered the Commissioned Corps. She did contribute a lot; she and her friend lived in a home in the North Valley of Albuquerque, which I think they had maintained during the entire time of her career as a commissioned officer in the USPHS. She was very highly regarded, by all accounts I ever heard.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, I've encountered her name several times, but she was a U.S. Public Health Service physician as opposed to a New Mexico one, so one doesn't find much about her. One does, however, find information about Marion Hotopp.

Having looked over your biography, I think a natural way for us to proceed today is to concentrate on the period of your employment with the Albuquerque Health Department, trying to increase its professionalism, and in our next meeting we can proceed to discuss your first period in Santa Fe. The chronology for today, then, would be 1955 to 1968, and when you signed on it was the Albuquerque Health Department.'

**GORDON:** That's correct. It started around the late 1930's or early 40's when then Mayor Clyde Tingley [who was really ex officio Chairman of the Albuquerque City Commission] appointed one city sanitary inspector to, ostensibly, regulate the hundreds of small dairies that existed then in the Rio Grande valley. None of the inspectors was qualified, but over the years there was a larger staff and they were variously known as Sanitary Inspectors and later the department was called

the City Sanitation Department and sometime prior to my joining the department it was changed to Albuquerque Health Department. That was a misnomer, in that it wasn't truly comprehensive as one thinks of a health department, but neither has the county health department ever been comprehensive; it has always emphasized personal public health.

**SPIDLE:** It's clear that during your first 13 or so years' tenure here, there were many jurisdictional problems from time to time, but there were a couple of details I wanted to ask about. For example, as the sanitarian in District VII, Silver City, you earned the princely sum of \$225 per month, which was paid to you in seven different checks!

**GORDON:** Yes, they came from Deming, Lordsburg, Silver City, Grant County, Hidalgo County, Luna County and one from the state of New Mexico, and together they added up to \$225. Of course I also received mileage at six cents per mile and per diem at six dollars a day, which I sometimes received all six dollars because I stayed overnight when I duties away from Silver City. I'd sleep in my car and clean up at a service station in the morning and go to work, so that per diem was gravy when you're broke! I was very happy with that.

**SPIDLE:** Did all those seven checks arrive on time? You were fortunate about that. There's also a reference to your doing plague surveillance as early as the 1950's, in addition to your other duties in Silver City.

**GORDON:** Yes! We already had a plague surveillance program in New Mexico, and a consultant on it I think his name was Ken Nutter who was stationed in Santa Fe. There was a consultant in Santa Fe on almost every program in the field. Nutter was an assignee from the U.S. Public Health Service, and on one occasion a *Life* magazine writer and photographer came down and we made a trip into the Gila Wilderness area, which was then very difficult to get into. He took a lot of photos of what we were doing collecting specimens and blood from rodents and there was supposed to be an article in *Life*, but they never published it.

**SPIDLE:** It struck me that that was very early; I think that may have been the first wave of concern about plague.

**GORDON:** It was among the earliest, but by then we had found that plague was endemic to most of New Mexico.

**SPIDLE:** I remember talking with Dr. Ashley Pond in Taos, who authored a paper with Dr. Jonathan Mann about the first case of human plague in New Mexico; I don't recall the date of that [the case or the paper? J.]

Returning to Albuquerque in the period 1955 to 1968, we talked before about the city's health department at that time being very political and not at all professional.

**GORDON:** Yes, most department employees were political appointees with no college or special training, and were out doing jobs that really required specialized knowledge and training.

**SPIDLE:** You mentioned the programs you established at the beginning of restructuring the department, and you started with food protection. I don't know if that was most important or whether you had to start somewhere.

**GORDON:** Food protection remains one of the mainstays of local health departments throughout the nation. It's one of the largest environmental programs at the local level. In fact, nationally I'm involved in some consulting work right now with the CDC. If we look at food protection from a public health priority viewpoint, it's really more important than air pollution or water pollution or solid waste and other issues that we're spending enormous amounts on. In those days a large percentage of our personnel were involved in food protection, and there was a lot to do.

**SPIDLE:** Describe some of that for me. Was it gross contamination? Utter disregard for the fundamentals?

**GORDON:** es. We'd find such things as mice in a meat grinder; mouse droppings in all sorts of food establishments; roaches; cross-connections; unsafe water supplies; failure to properly sanitize eating utensils; poor refrigeration or, sometimes, no refrigeration. These were serious issues, not just whether food service workers had hairnets or not. I served as a Special Consultant to the U.S. Public Health Service during those years and assisted in developing a new national food code and a new national method of evaluating food sanitation programs. Under that methodology, Albuquerque was definitely the lowest in the state, and maybe among the lower in the nation. We had a long ways to go, starting from the bottom.

**SPIDLE:** One particular question about protecting the food supply in restaurants. Was there an ethnic dimension to that issue as there often is in New Mexico about many things?

**GORDON:** Not that I was ever aware of. We were evenhanded, and I don't think ethnic differences ever came up. The food program, when we began, was regulating the restaurants and other food establishments in accordance with the state and local regulations. This caused some immediate concerns on the part of the organized restaurant industry, and they met

with me at Oakie Joe's Restaurant to bluntly tell me that, if we continued this, I'd be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. I heard more of the same years later about the air pollution control program. But we proceeded, and the results of our daily activities were published in the daily paper, and the public and elected officials supported the effort. It wasn't long before Peter Griego and I he was one of my saviors were made honorary lifetime members of the New Mexico Restaurant Association. The industry finally recognized that we were making it safe to eat out, and the public responded accordingly.

**SPIDLE:** The resistance, then, was not ethnically based. Resentment about the government trying to tell us what to do' was evenly spread around.

**GORDON:** Yes. No one had ever tried to do it before. I remember we temporarily closed the restaurant in a major downtown hotel, the Franciscan, and the out-of-town owners called me at home and said they were going to call my boss and get this straightened out. They asked, who was my boss? I suggested they just skip the middlemen and go directly to Maurice Sanchez, Chairman of the City Commission, and see what he said about it. I never heard any more about it.

**SPIDLE:** The industry resistance is obvious, and it must've taken some political gifts on your part to smooth things out and ultimately become an honorary member of the association.

**GORDON:** Perhaps some people would call it political; I never have. Even later, when I was Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment, people frequently call those political roles, and I always resented it, because I never played politics.

**GORDON:** Once, when I was Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment, Governor Carruthers introduced me to an audience, and I thought the introduction was great. He said, I want to assure you that Larry Gordon doesn't know the first thing about politics. Lack of political skills caused me some problems, really; maybe I should be a little more politically astute than I ever was, but I wasn't. So be it.

**SPIDLE:** This is a consistent theme we'll be discussing, because you decided to be professional and evenhanded and let the chips fall where they might. But still, it is by definition couched within a political context.

**GORDON:** It is; that's part of government and government relies on politics for action.

All the major policies, budgets, and so on, eventually have to come from politicians, elected officials. But I always found that they, in the long run, respected someone doing what he or she is supposed to do. We didn't conduct any public opinion polls; any of the things we did, from improving the food program to developing air pollution programs or housing conservation and rehabilitation programs, or whatever, there was no overt public demand for any of those. I viewed those as things we ought to do, and we did. It wasn't as though there was a big ground swell of public demand. I think too many people do that now: wait for the public or the elected officials to demand something. I thought the better ideas came from professional public officials. I'm not sure that's as true today.

**SPIDLE:** I had deduced that from what I know so far about your career. In a way it's two things: your professional expertise and your careful linkage with institutions like the U.S. Public Health Service and the American Public Health Association. Both are part of the explanation of your success and strength. With your professional contacts and professionalism, you bring ideas to the table as opposed to waiting for crises to occur.

**GORDON:** Yes, and I think my education in public health was important too. It gave me the feeling that I knew the issues and solutions, and it was my job to try to implement those solutions. It's true, too, that I developed relationships early in my career with national groups and became a commissioned officer in the Public Health Service Reserve in 1955. I remain, by the way, despite my age, a commissioned officer -- inactive status -- in the U.S. Public Health Service Reserve.

**SPIDLE:** This is a case study of what we're talking about. We're not talking about nine people dying of botulism poisoning at some restaurant downtown and having to do something about it. We're talking about a professionally trained administrator who says, There are national codes and ways to do this.

**GORDON:** Yes, I mentioned before that it was in the 1950's that we got so active here, and I was appointed a Special Consultant to the Surgeon General and was one of the consultants that met in Washington several times and developed a completely new national food code that the Public Health Service recommended for state and local adoption. I was also asked as a consultant to write the forward to the new code myself; that was around 1957-58.

**SPIDLE:** If that's not distinguished experience in public health! That's very early in your career.

**GORDON:** Looking back, I was still wet behind the ears. I was too naive to know I could fail or get in trouble. There were a couple of issues I didn't mention in that manuscript of mine, and I may add them in some time. One of them was that

sometime in the 50's the city went to what they called a directorate system, where there was a director of a directorate for, as examples, public safety or finance. Each of these directorates included several departments, and the health department was placed in one called the Health and Welfare' directorate. That was OK, except my boss Wade Cooper, the director of health and welfare, decided he loved me, and kept coming to my house evenings and weekends and wanting to go to Santa Fe with me every time I had business in Santa Fe.

This went on for some time, and I was a pretty naïve country boy. Finally I talked with my wife and she also wondered what Cooper's problem was. During those years, I did a lot of backpacking and fly fishing, and Wade Cooper kept insisting that he and I have a backpack trip together. So one day we met at the old Hilton Hotel coffee shop. I said, Well, Wade, I've got it all organized for us to go this weekend, and my brother Ladd, Director of the Department of Game and Fish, is coming along, and Bob Brashear, the City Hall Tribune reporter, is also coming along. He said, No, Gordon, just you and me, to which I responded, Bullshit, Wade. You need some help!

So I stopped seeing or reporting to Wade Cooper, and started to contact City Commissioners and tell them this was an unworkable situation. It may have taken two years, but finally the City Commission met and one of the Commissioners moved that the position of Director of the Health and Welfare Directorate be abolished. Another seconded and the chair asked if there was any discussion. There was no discussion, there was a unanimous vote, and Cooper was out of there.

The reason I brought this up is that during that period of time, in one year, I was the only city employee who didn't get a pay raise. So one afternoon, Art Jones, who was Assistant City Manager (and whom I liked very much) came to see me in my office. He said they could give me a pay raise if I could get along with Wade Cooper. I looked at the clock on the wall and said, Art, it's 2:00 PM here and 4:00 PM in Washington. I can have my commission in the U.S. Public Health Service activated before 5:00 PM in Washington. Is that what you want? Art responded, No, we don't want that. So I got my pay raise. That's not in the manuscript.

**SPIDLE:** No, it's not. That's a study in harassment before it became a big public issue.

**GORDON:** Actually, Wade Cooper was a very competent individual, and he gave me a lot of good ideas, but I didn't need his affection.

**SPIDLE:** This may be the logical point to establish clearly the important link with the U.S. Public Health Service you've alluded to, and it began in 1955. It seems to me that your relationship with that agency has been critically important professionally and, I gather, personally too.

**GORDON:** It was very important.

**SPIDLE:** How did it start?

**GORDON:** It's one of those things, like getting into public health, that was happenstance. Two senior members of the state health department, Carl Jensen and Carl Henderson told me they had applied for USPHS Commissions to participate in monitoring radiation fallout and exposure from the nuclear devices that were being tested at the Nevada Test Site. I thought that was a pretty good idea, so I applied and was given a commission; I've forgotten what grade. U.S. Public Health Service commissioned officers have the same ranks as Navy officers. So a number of years ago I was promoted to the rank equivalent to a Navy Captain; in Public Health Service lingo it's called a Director Grade officer. The next step after that is to have a star or two, which you never receive as a reserve officer. Yes, that relationship was very valuable to me.

**SPIDLE:** This was sort of a contract relationship, at least originally?

**GORDON:** Yes. They would activate your commission, just as they would a military officer, and they still use their reserve corps officers that way. You go on active duty for a time; they still activate commissions in response to emergencies somewhere -- actually anywhere in the world -- because commissioned officers in the U.S. Public Health Service are considered a mobile corps that can rapidly respond to emergencies wherever needed. That gave me camaraderie with some important people in the Public Health Service; it still does to this day. I still have a professional relationship with many people in the Service.

**SPIDLE:** Those contacts and relationships also aided you in that first period here in Albuquerque. Clearly, you drew on it to strengthen demonstration programs

**GORDON:** We also established professional relationships with the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In those days nearly all the federal environmental health programs, and they weren't necessarily called that, were in the U.S. Public Health Service. Gradually, by the time EPA was created in 1971, most were in the Consumer

Protection and Environmental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Public Health Service. So when EPA was created, it wasn't as if they created something new; they basically transferred all those programs out of the Public Health Service, and a few from the Atomic Energy Commission, Agriculture and Interior. Interior had water pollution programs by then. They transferred those programs out of those other departments and budgeted vastly increased money and legislated additional powers for the Environmental Protection Agency. We'll get to that later, I'm sure.

**SPIDLE:** Next session, yes. Let's stay focused on Albuquerque for a bit now. Here's an interesting statement in your manuscript: Solutions were frequently more simple in those days. [the 60s]. We were able to solve many problems through administrative decision and actions without going through the process of gaining passage of a new ordinance, regulation or statute.

**GORDON:** Yes, I remember several examples. I mentioned in the manuscript that we used to have shoe-fitting fluoroscopes in all the shoe stores, and the kids and their mothers would all try them out. Of course while you were looking at the shoes and the feet and the bones, radiation was scattering throughout your body and all around the room; there was no shielding on the machines. When I determined it wasn't safe to use those machines, I got rid of them by simply writing letters and telling the retailers they had to dispose of them.

Also, I'd heard about deaths from plastic garment bags when they were first introduced, so without an ordinance, we told the stores to either put warning labels on the bags or add perforations, because the bags had been known to suffocate children. All cleaners complied within a few weeks.

**SPIDLE:** These days you'd have to have hearings and public notices and assessments from everybody.

**GORDON:** Yes. We did that on a number of issues. We also used the public health nuisance statute very widely if we couldn't think of any other method to get the job done. And it worked, and we never had to go to court over any of those measures. We decided that cross connections were a problem. For the uninitiated, cross-connections are any sort of a connection where you might possibly get back-flow of waste water or sewage or an unapproved water supply into an approved water supply. We started investigating and discovered they were all over town; I could find them in any restaurant. We started an organized campaign to get rid of those. We found cross connections on all the slabs in the mortuaries where the cadavers could have their bodily fluids sucked back into the city water supply. Of course people responded when we told them what it was about, but we didn't get an ordinance passed; we just had the problems corrected.

Today, one doesn't move on a problem until you check with the agency's legal staff. I took the position that the legal staff was there to defend me if and when I got into hot water over something I'd already taken action on. If I checked on the legality first, I might be told I couldn't take the action I felt was necessary. Frank Horan, who died recently, was a city attorney I dealt with; a great guy, and he cooperated with me.

**SPIDLE:** During the period 1955-1968 the name of that agency was changed from Albuquerque Health Department to Albuquerque Environmental Health Department. Also, for a time, it was the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department.

**GORDON:** I may have garbled this in my manuscript. It was actually created as the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department, after I developed the concept of getting a joint powers agreement between the City, the County, the state Board of Finance and the state Board of Health that would have the City doing all the environmental health programs in the city and the county. So, we developed and gained approval of the joint powers agreement. I subsequently wrote the city/county environmental health code and we got that passed. The few county environmental health personnel were transferred to our department and became city employees. Then, under the joint powers agreement, we administered all county environmental health ordinances for the city and the county.

I think that arrangement was years ahead of its time, but it was later repealed during the time I was in Santa Fe as Director of the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency. Now, they're still discussing the need for a city-county government merger.

During those years I also had the brainstorm that we should have a regional solid waste management program, and I talked with friends in the U.S. Public Health Service, especially Dick Vaughan, another commissioned officer I knew well. They agreed to give us about \$600,000 as seed money to get a regional program started. I convened a meeting at the convention center of representatives of all the municipalities, counties, tribes and school districts, and everyone signed up for it. The local entities also agreed to participate financially. But about that time there were changes in Washington, Dick got transferred, and the idea of federal funding fell through. We were going to transport solid wastes up and down the valley on the railroad track to convenient centers for transferring it from railroad cars to landfill sites that we would establish as end repositories. So, it was an idea that didn't fly.

**SPIDLE:** Because it was contingent on that federal seed money. An effort like that wasn't a total loss, though. You gained that experience of trying to coordinate disparate constituencies toward a common goal. It all goes into building a base of information expertise.

**GORDON:** Yes. There were other efforts over the years which we'll talk about. One was that we were pushing rapid mass transit in those days as an air pollution control measure. It never got a lot of serious attention, but I like to think we at least brought up the issue, and it's now being discussed again.

**SPIDLE:** You injected it into the public debate and consciousness.

I'm struck by the name 'environmental health department' as opposed to simply 'health department,' reflecting that kind of emphasis.

**GORDON:** Well, that was what it really was. We had very few programs that really weren't environmental health, so I had an agreement with a new District Health Officer, Dr. Bruce Storrs, who died a couple of years ago. He was an MD MPH from Yale, a nice guy who drank too much. He and I had several meetings and we agreed that the District would be responsible for personal public health and the City would handle environmental health. Somewhere in that era I also saw the need to stop the constant controversy with the county, and get the New Mexico Municipal Health Act passed.

Up to that point state law provided that municipalities and school districts may hire their own personnel but they shall report to and submit such reports as necessary to the District Health Officer as he may deem necessary. I ignored that requirement because I was hired by the city, paid by the city, and the city manager was my boss. This antagonized two or three District Health Officers who resigned out of frustration. From today's perspective, about 95% of environmental health activities at the state level are no longer in health departments. They're still public health, but not in the health department; they're in some other agency. In those days, however, such organizational diversification was a new concept.

I developed a bill and had it introduced; it passed one house of the legislature and went to the other. At that point, State Health Director Dr. Stanley Leland managed to get some committee to recall it. I contacted Edith Schulmeister, who was very involved in, if not the president, of the New Mexico Farm Bureau, and with whom we had good relations because of our milk sanitation program. In those days we administered the milk sanitation program practically statewide out of Albuquerque because the dairies shipped into Albuquerque, and I took the attitude that we were going to supervise them. So I had personnel who went to Farmington, Clovis, and all over the state where the milk was produced and shipped into the Albuquerque market. Edith Schulmeister developed enough pressure to get that bill voted out of committee with a do pass. It was enacted by the legislature and signed by Governor Dave Cargo.

The Municipal Health Act specifies the powers and duties of a municipal health director, as well as the qualifications for that position. I had written into it that a municipal health director must have at least an MPH from an accredited school of public health. That is still in the law.

**SPIDLE:** As opposed to being the mayor's campaign manager.

**GORDON:** Or, as we joked during the Toney Anaya years, being the governor's barber. Regrettably, those qualifications are not written in the statute for the state health agency. I tried to have them included and failed miserably; one of many failures. But, up to now, every director of the city's Environmental Health Department has had an MPH. I can't justify that there are not other good educational backgrounds, but once you open such a door, it can be anybody the mayor or CAO wants to appoint without regard for qualifications.

**SPIDLE:** This, at the local level, prefigures something that happens nationally: a turf dispute between environmental programs as opposed to personal health care delivery.

**GORDON:** This became the first local jurisdiction in the nation to have a local environmental health department. We'll talk later about the creation of the EPA, but I also testified before President Nixon's Commission on Executive Reorganization, supporting the idea of creating the EPA and making recommendations on behalf of the American Public Health Association as to its scope, powers and duties.

**SPIDLE:** We've touched on several things that caught my attention in your manuscript: the creative tension with the state health department, and how to factor in the county work in the same general sphere. That's one of the major themes of your work as a public health official, this final separation between hands-on health care delivery and this whole other ball of wax.'

**GORDON:** In my career, I'm particularly proud of three accomplishments: First, hiring, developing, mentoring and sending personnel to graduate school. Many have been, and still are, in key roles around the nation and in New Mexico. Second is creating agencies: the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department, the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency, the State Health Agency, and the Scientific Laboratory System. The third is gaining enactment of state and local laws and regulations.

I got along pretty well with Dr. Leland, who was a good state health director, but a real boozier. Sometimes when I'd go into his office in the morning to see him, he'd be shaking all over. Paul Masters, his Administrative Assistant, was a very competent person, too. Paul would be with Leland in the office, handling everything for him. One night at a dinner in Old Town, Stanley Leland sat there bleary-eyed and said, Larry, I'm going to pull the rug out from under you. He tried, but didn't.

**SPIDLE:** That's part of that turf dispute that ultimately results in two parallel, but separate, agencies.

**GORDON:** And both are public health, I always hasten to add.

**SPIDLE:** I see how you in environmental programs could argue, We are in the basic tradition of public health: prevention.

**GORDON:** I just read something yesterday developed by the Pew Charitable Trusts that funds a lot of public health work in this nation. They have decided that, with the advent of managed care, public health departments have lost a lot of public health aspects, other than environmental health, and they'd better get public health departments back in the ball game. They're a little late, but they've recognized that. There was a Roper poll a couple of years ago that found the public didn't know what public health was, but if you asked them, Do you support vaccination programs, maternal & child health, dental health, air and water pollution control measures? they said, Oh, yeah, we like those.

**SPIDLE:** It is certainly claimed for managed care that it will prevent illness and disease, but whether that's the case or not is moot.

**GORDON:** Yes, they do claim that. I don't think they're doing so on a community or population basis, though. Health care is different; it's the diagnosis, treatment and/or rehabilitation of a patient under care, whereas public health deals with prevention in populations and communities. And environmental health is part of public health. I believe managed care is not doing that job, but they've managed to get a lot of the funding that might have gone into those programs moved into managed care. When the national health care debates commenced six years ago, the national public health establishment started identifying with health care. Pretty soon everyone thought public health was health care; it really wasn't, and still isn't. They shot themselves in the collective foot by not recognizing the important differences between health care and public health, and emphasizing the primacy of prevention.

**SPIDLE:** Bringing the discussion back to Albuquerque, there was a throw-away line in your manuscript that interested me. Problems with swimming pools: 16 pools were closed in 1959. What was driving that?

**GORDON:** Well, I found that we had what were termed fill and draw' pools, which meant a pool was simply a large concrete tank, like those I swam in as a kid. The tank was filled with water, and when the water got dirty, you'd draw, or drain, it out. There was no filtration, no recirculation, no chlorination, so we closed the pools. Many of those pools were operated by the city, and we closed them as well.

**SPIDLE:** It sounded like so many pools!

**GORDON:** Today there are many more, with motel pools and so on, but now they're designed to include chlorination and filtration, etc., and their construction is supervised.

**SPIDLE:** One particular reason I noted that item was that for my History of Medicine class I'm writing the lecture on the history of poliomyelitis, and I'm old enough to remember the polio epidemics in the 1950's when public swimming pools were closed down.

**GORDON:** Looking back on it now, I'm not sure historically if you can find there was a good reason for those closures, but we did it. We had a polio epidemic in New Mexico in Las Cruces sometime in the early 50's when I was with the state health department, before coming to the city. I was sent to Las Cruces and we closed restaurants, swimming pools; we did all sorts of things, and we meant well. I'm not sure we prevented any polio cases, but we were trying. We were doing what we thought was right based on what we knew at the time.

Public health, like other movements, has done things that made no sense. Some years ago, with the concern over the Love Canal, Dr. Godfrey, the New York State health commissioner, ordered Love Canal evacuated. Epidemiologic studies done

after the fact haven't been able to find any relationship between Love Canal and diseases in the area. There have been other cases like that. A friend of mine, Dr. Vernon Hough who was an Assistant Surgeon General and Director of the National Center for Environmental Health at CDC, ordered the evacuation of Times Beach, Missouri due to dioxin contamination. Before he died he testified before Congress that he was sorry he did that. But he acted on what he thought needed to be done, and I applaud him for that.

**SPIDLE:** Logically, how can you tell how many cases of whatever were prevented by a particular measure?

**GORDON:** You're usually not sorry you took these actions. It's when you didn't take them that you're liable to be sorry if something unfortunate occurs.

**SPIDLE:** Referring back to your manuscript: a fight with the county health department regarding shallow wells and other jurisdictional things

**GORDON:** That was one of the things that triggered the need for a city/county environmental health department, when I found that the county personnel were apparently incapable of doing their job outside the city. After all, it's just one community, but I finally had reason to believe there was a problem with the water supply at Lee Acres School in the north valley. That was outside the city limits, and I sent Peter Griego out to take a water sample, which was jurisdictionally inappropriate. The water sample came back positive, and this really upset the county personnel, understandably. But we were trying to find out what was going on, and that led to a great deal of concern about their ability to handle such situations.

**SPIDLE:** It strikes me that a lot of the initiative came from your desk. A lot of this was Larry Gordon taking the bull by the horns, rather than reading newspaper headlines to see what people were concerned about. You were confident in your professional background and what you were told by your professional colleagues around the country.

**GORDON:** I needed a job as much as anyone around; my wife was a stay-at-home mother, and I never made big bucks. But one thing that really helped was the assurance that any time I needed to be on active duty as a commissioned officer in the Public Health Service, I'd be brought aboard. I thought, Well, if they fire me here, I'll be on another payroll right away. That was excellent backing.

**SPIDLE:** I think this was an extraordinary 13-year period that you spent in the employ of the City of Albuquerque. We do need to talk explicitly, as you do in your manuscript, about the interface with the political/professional managers like Edmund Engel, G.. Robertson, and the City Commission. It seems you were able to get what you wanted from them most of the time.

**GORDON:** I had very good support from the press; in those days there were stories in the local papers and on television several times a week about what we were doing. Reporters from both the *Journal* and the *Tribune* used to come by my office nearly every day just to ask what we were doing. The City Manager was very professional and supportive. Before we had City Councilors we had City Commissioners elected at-large, and they weren't then as they are now concerned only with what happened in their districts; they cared about the city as a whole, because they were elected at large. They were very supportive.

Edmund Engel was an excellent City Manager, and a visionary. One of his proposals that was a significant I wish I could say it was my idea was to annex the entire valley area from Isleta Pueblo on the south to Sandia Pueblo on the north to solve many problems that still need solutions to this day. There was an article in this morning's paper about the need to create a regional government, and a legislative push to do that. Engel had the idea that we should go ahead and annex that area, and he asked me to write a paper (which I have in my files) indicating what City government could do about water, sewage, solid waste, insect and rodent control, food, and so on if the area was annexed to the city. There were other papers besides mine, addressing other governmental issues.

The City Commission actually annexed all the valley areas under a statutory provision that any time the city had any area encircled, the Commission could annex the area. So the city, with the approval of other land owners, annexed various large encircled large areas. But my friend Alfred Schwartzman, who managed Schwartzman Packing Company, didn't really want to be annexed, because he had severe water pollution problems at his slaughterhouse and packing company. We thought it would help him by giving him access to the city's sewage treatment system, but he didn't see it that way. He hired an attorney who took the city to court, and we lost the case. It was great planning, but maybe poor politics. If annexation had been accomplished, however, it would have solved many serious problems that still exist.

**SPIDLE:** I'm interested in your comments about the press in particular, being so supportive. I don't want to say they were a useful tool for you, because that's implying you manipulated them.

**GORDON:** No, but we certainly had the feeling that if we were open to them, they would be helpful to us. Our policy was that the public were our stockholders and were entitled to know what we were doing.

**SPIDLE:** But you were, by definition, operating within a political structure, but broadly, over that 13-year period, if you needed political cooperation you could make your case and get what you needed. It's interesting, too, that the commissioners were able to look at the good of the city as a whole.

**GORDON:** Yes, I think it was a step backward to create a mayor-council form of government, with each councilor interested only in his/her own neighborhood. The City Council also created a whole new bureaucracy by having a City Council staff. The old City Commission didn't have a staff; the City Manager worked directly for them and city employees were their staff. I thought it was an excellent form of government.

Another issue that came up was air pollution. Albuquerque was one of the first communities in the nation to develop a local air pollution program. Moises Sandoval, a *Tribune* reporter, was particularly helpful at the start, writing a whole series of front-page articles over a period of several weeks; they're on file in city offices and at the UNM Medical History Library.

His articles portrayed the severe problems in the area, which were much worse than they are now. So we developed a proposed ordinance for the city and county and held public hearings, to which few people came. Then, when we proposed the ordinance to the city and county commissions, the Albuquerque Industrial Development Service invited me to a closed room meeting at the old Chamber of Commerce building and proclaimed, that if I persisted I'd be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. Further, they alleged that our proceeding with the proposed ordinance would ruin the local economy by having air pollution controls. I ran into that again years later at the state level.

But we went ahead. Both the city and county commissions adopted the proposed ordinance very rapidly. Harry Kinney, later Albuquerque Mayor, was then a County Commissioner, and was particularly supportive. They created a city/county air pollution control program. We were, in part, able to sell that because by having a city program we would be eligible for three-to-one matching federal funds, but if we had a city/county program we'd be eligible for two-to-one matching funds. That was a convincing argument for having a coordinated program. We developed a very active program, and made a lot of improvements over the years.

**SPIDLE:** The establishment of this air pollution control program occurred before the identification of, and emphasis on, automobile emissions as a source of air pollution.

**GORDON:** Correct.

**SPIDLE:** What was the emphasis in that early period? Wood smoke?

**GORDON:** There was a lot of open burning. You could look out of any tall building, in any direction, and see plumes of smoke from autos being burned at wreckage yards, fields being burned, etc. It was the tail end of the period when people were still using a lot of wood for heating. I think I mentioned before that wood was a valuable commodity in this area back in the 1930's when my father was a forest ranger on the nearby Tijeras District. That's where he learned to speak Spanish, because he'd have to deal with wood haulers and their wagons getting permits to cut wood in the forest and bring it back into Albuquerque to sell. There was an almost steady stream of wagons coming in and out of the city hauling wood. In those days we didn't anticipate the full significance of automobile pollution, but we solved other serious problems.

**SPIDLE:** I want to talk about some of those other things. There was some wood pollution, and there were a lot of industrial plants burning coal in addition to wood smoke, and then there was this casual burning. What else created air pollution in those days?

**GORDON:** Unpaved roads were a big issue, and we worked on that. The open burning I mentioned, and fireplaces; and diesels emitted a great deal of smoke if they were not regulated; we started doing that. Those were among the main problems. Asphalt mix plants were major sources, and we started regulating those. I remember one day or maybe several times there was so much pollution from asphalt mix pollution around South Broadway and Edith that I-25 was closed for a short time.

**SPIDLE:** One of the things that strikes me about your trying to develop an overarching air pollution control program or at least moving in that direction as early as this is that there are so many agencies. You've got pueblos, the military base, not just city and county.

**GORDON:** No. In later years a Presidential Executive Order regarding air pollution, mandated that military installations were to comply with local codes. That was not true in those days, but we had a good relationship, especially, with Sandia Base.

A good friend of mine, Bill Kingsley, was director of environmental health for Sandia Corporation, and I was made a consultant to Sandia Corporation, as I was to Los Alamos for similar reasons. We had good results getting them to comply.

**SPIDLE:** You'd have to, given their size and the dimensions of their operations. Was there any concern as early as the 50's and 60's about noise pollution?

**GORDON:** Not really. That came up years later. We were aware of it; I remember learning about it in a textbook in the school of public health. We usually thought of noise as a problem in the occupational environment, rather than the community at large.

**SPIDLE:** You were cleaning up food and beginning to worry about the air, water, sewage

**GORDON:** Another area we got into was housing conservation and rehabilitation. We enacted a local housing conservation and rehabilitation code, which in those days was an unusual local effort. Healthful housing was, and still is, a public health issue, and we basically adopted the Housing Conservation and Rehabilitation code developed by the American Public Health Association. Also, the National Association of Real Estate Boards sent a team in to help us, and we did have some problems with the local Home Builders Association. Howard Peg Parsons was the executive director, but we worked with him and worked out the things they were most concerned about, and got the code passed.

The Housing Conservation and Rehabilitation Code is still in existence in Albuquerque. I don't know if they're doing much work on it; it's no longer in the Environmental Health Department, and instead of being proactive in how they administer the program, they wait for complaints. We would select neighborhoods and go through the whole neighborhood with Code Enforcement. We had the cooperation of the Fire Department, the Refuse Department, the Building Department, and got special rates from the lumber yards and so forth. We developed it along with Clean Up, Paint Up, Fix Up campaigns; we really improved entire neighborhoods. There was even a provision in those days by which some people could get help from the Welfare Department, if necessary. I thought we made significant improvements. Later, during the years I was in Santa Fe, the program was transferred out of the Environmental Health Department, and it now reacts rather than being proactive.

**SPIDLE:** I can remember those clean up, pick up, fix up campaigns when I was a kid, so that must've been a national initiative.

**GORDON:** Yes, that was a common slogan; we didn't dream it up. And we didn't dream up the housing code. The American Public Health Association had a recommended code which had been developed by another friend of mine, who's still alive: Eric Mood. He's now with Yale University, but he was then Director of Environmental Health for New Haven, Connecticut. This is all trivia

**SPIDLE:** It's wonderful. One thing we haven't touched on is financing and staff. Apparently you were able to at least get by, if not get exactly what you needed.

**GORDON:** I think we got good support for what we needed. Looking back on it, I have no complaints. I think every bureaucracy thinks it needs more personnel than it's ever going to get, but we were able to do the job we were assigned to do.

**SPIDLE:** And it's clear that you insisted that this was a professional agency. Did you have to fend off those who wanted to?

**GORDON:** Not really. The State Health Department was having more trouble with that during those years than I did, and I helped obtain passage of a State Sanitarians Registration Act through the Legislature. The job title sanitarian was common then, but not used much anymore. We weren't really getting a lot of political pressure; the state was, and getting that Act gave them more power than they had under the merit system regulations to fend off that sort of thing of someone wanting their cousin hired.

**SPIDLE:** That brings us full circle then. When you came to Albuquerque in 1955 it was largely a political agency, in a way, and now, in the late 1960's, you were ready to move on to Santa Fe.

**GORDON:** Another thing that happened with all these unqualified personnel I knew I had to get rid of; I may have mentioned this before. I started holding all-day training sessions every Friday, and I found that unqualified people didn't want to be trained, and a lot of them just resigned. I was then able to replace them with qualified people.

**SPIDLE:** To select Friday as the training day

**GORDON:** I'm not sure why I chose Fridays.

**SPIDLE:** (laughing) If one's custom is to kind of slack off or knock off early the end of the week, one would especially resent the idea of training scheduled at that time!

**GORDON:** Actually, I started doing that before I was Director. I was still Chief Sanitarian then.

**SPIDLE:** This is wonderful and, as I've said, having your manuscript Environmental Health and Protection Adventures to serve as a foundation allows us to play off that to fill in gaps and still touch other areas in our discussion. I propose that we go on, next time, then, to that first full period in Santa Fe. That stretches at least

**GORDON:** Golly! You've made all kind of notes there.

**SPIDLE:** Yes! This, as you see, is just a draft, but when I'm done my Larry Gordon C.V. is going to be bigger than yours.

**SPIDLE:** In looking over your C.V., putting it all together, I was surprised to find that when you left Albuquerque in 1968, you were gone for 14 years!

**GORDON:** Yes, all together. During that period of time, though, I got the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency created and organized; the State Scientific Laboratory authorized, constructed and organized; the State Health Agency created; and numerous state laws enacted.

**SPIDLE:** Well, in today's discussion I do want to get at least up to that Scientific Laboratory development project, but I'm having a hard time sorting out the agency name changes, while there are clearly some distinct job changes going on as well. I'm sure you'll be able to clarify those as we go along.

Perhaps we should begin with your decision to leave Albuquerque. Your reasons for that decision aren't clear to me.

**GORDON:** I believe there's an innate desire in most of us to take on more responsibility. I was doing very well in Albuquerque, and I think I took a small cut in pay to go to Santa Fe. When you add into that the increase in the cost of commuting, it was probably a noticeable pay cut. But Health and Social Services Executive Director John Jasper offered me the position of Director of the Environmental Services Division that would allow me to implement some ideas I'd had over the years and that I felt would be effective at the state level, so I accepted the position.

**SPIDLE:** Would you identify John Jasper, please?

**GORDON:** John was an attorney, a bright, capable person who's probably still around. He practiced law and did some lobbying, plus doing a lot of drafting work on legislation for the Legislative Council. He had been appointed director of the newly created Health and Social Services Department after Governor Dave Cargo had merged the Health and Welfare Departments by Executive Order. John Jasper found it necessary to spend most of his time dealing with welfare issues, and very little on the rest of the department.

**SPIDLE:** Well, you probably have to spend more time on welfare issues, because the solutions to the problems aren't, at least superficially, clear.

**GORDON:** That's a real problem. It's more controversial, it's bigger, budget-wise; it just dwarfs health programs in terms of the money spent on health. And even comparing public health to health care, even when you get in the same department with health care, as differentiated from public health, you end up spending your time on health care, which I had to do years later as Secretary of the Health and Environment Department. Two thirds of my budget ended up being for health care. State programs on alcoholism, mental health and developmental disabilities are health care.

**SPIDLE:** The reason I asked about John Jasper, a Cargo appointee, is because it seems to me that when you're called up to Santa Fe it is explicitly a professional appointment, as opposed to a political appointment.

**GORDON:** It was a professional appointment; I was in an exempt position, but I'd been in an exempt position in Albuquerque, too.

**SPIDLE:** And, being realistic, there's clearly a political element to it also.

**GORDON:** Yes. I never thought of myself as a political appointee, but that's certainly what the public thinks of such an appointment.

**SPIDLE:** But it's not as though you had to have been a member of Governor Cargo's party in order to be appointed to the position. It was clearly your professional credentials and expertise and record that prompted John Jasper to call on you for the vacancy, despite Jasper himself being a political appointee.

**GORDON:** Yes. John was a very capable, hardworking person.

**SPIDLE:** In the structure of things, though, you theoretically had a layer between you and the pure politics.

**GORDON:** Actually, there was one other layer. There was a rather complex organizational chart in which John Jasper had another person in between the two of us: Eugene Mariani. Gene was a PhD psychologist who had been in private practice; he has passed away since then. His title was Director of Programs, so he had direct control over all the programs, both health and welfare. He was, in effect, John Jasper's chief deputy, and I suppose that left John more free for more important things the legislature, etc.

**SPIDLE:** The reason I asked the question was that I'm interested in the degree of intimacy between you and the legislature. Were you involved directly?

**GORDON:** Oh, yes, absolutely. I was involved in the budget hearings and I think I put it in my manuscript. I think one of the first things Gene Mariani told me was, We don't even know what the budget is for your agency. It was really a mess, so I developed a Program Guide' (which is described in the manuscript), which I found out later was probably the first such document in the nation. It had become apparent very early that we didn't know who we were, what we did; we didn't know what our programs were, we couldn't describe ourselves. So, the Program Guide described exactly what we did in terms of our mission; defined each program; defined the statutory authority; defined the agencies we worked with at the local, state and federal level. I had some nice feedback on that guide, including a letter from C.C. Johnson, Jr., who was an assistant administrator at what was then the newly-created U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). C.C. Johnson noted that the Guide was light years ahead of other states.

**SPIDLE:** That's something I especially want to get on the record: the fact that some of the priorities of New Mexico's public agencies included issues that had you on the ground and running' before the EPA came into being.

**GORDON:** Yes, I envisioned, and obtained the authority to create, the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department some ten years before the EPA came along, and it was the first local environmental health department in the nation. Then, when I went to Santa Fe, John Jasper hired me to create what was called the Environmental Services Division, and I began making the necessary changes so that, by the time we received the legislative authorization to create the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency, which was the first title of that agency, we didn't need to make any organizational changes. We got a lot more authority, a lot more budget, and had our structures already in place.

**SPIDLE:** The very idea that New Mexico was ahead of the curve in important respects, as opposed to, Well, OK, now the feds have themselves organized, so we have to have an agency to plug in

**GORDON:** Another thing: we created a more comprehensive agency than the federal agency, which I still regret the EPA has never done. I was fortunate to be requested to testify before President Nixon's Commission on Executive Reorganization, which was called the Ashe Committee after its chairman, Roy Ashe, the head of Litton Industries. A lot of things were happening concurrently with that Committee's meetings. The President was considering executive reorganization and the Senate Public Works and Environment Committee, under the chairmanship of Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, was also holding hearings. I testified regarding the scope and mission of the EPA, and, from a public health perspective, we recommended a broader agency than was created.

The EPA really wasn't new. What they did was take most of the programs out of the pre-existing Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Services Administration of the Public Health Service. They also transferred pesticide regulation from the Department of Agriculture, and water pollution from Interior, etc. That's how the EPA was created. But as we'd previously done in New Mexico, when the EPA was created it was given vastly new authority, personnel and money.

**SPIDLE:** But it was created with a focus on air, water

**GORDON:** es and, regrettably, to this day it remains largely an air/water/waste agency, and we recommended that it should include other issues to be truly comprehensive.

**SPIDLE:** our authority was, at that time, that you'd already been doing this for ten years!

**GORDON:** Yes. I have to give credit to Governor Bruce King. When he was running for office, probably in the fall of 1970, he talked about creating an environmental protection agency. I ran into him one night at Chicago's O'Hare Airport and

visited for a few minutes. I learned he wanted an EPA it sounded good and that's what the feds were doing but he really didn't know what he wanted in it. So I wrote him a detailed recommendation, and he later asked Representative Jamie Koch of Santa Fe to carry the bill for him. Jamie came to me and we talked about it, and I gave him a copy of that program guide I had developed. He thought that was wonderful, because it already spelled out what we ought to do! So, a lot of the program guide was used in drafting the bill, in terms of goals and missions and specifying the programs. That's what was written into the law when the state's Environmental Improvement Agency was created. I remind people occasionally, it wasn't entirely new. It was just further organizational evolution from Harold Gray, the first state sanitary engineer in 1919 just another step.

It was the same later with creating the Scientific Laboratory. It was somewhat different in some respects, but it was just a further evolution of what Myrtle Greenfield started.

**SPIDLE:** I like the idea that Harold Gray started something in 1919, and after the public and political process mulls it over, 51 years later we decide what to do about it!

**GORDON:** There's a lot of truth to that. Of course, our problems were becoming more complex and more compelling: more people, more chemicals in the environment. They started out with Harold Gray, who was probably a typical, excellent old-line sanitary engineer, and his expertise was undoubtedly like other sanitary engineers trained in water and sewage. Those were the big problems: malaria was also a big problem in the state in those days, so he was active in dealing with those issues. They probably never thought about air pollution, and I know they never got involved with the pollution of streams; they were involved with sewage treatment and septic tanks. So they did a lot of important things; I don't mean to denigrate their work in any way. The problems were different then. Who had ever heard of occupational health or safety then? Or about radiation protection, or toxic chemicals, or hazardous wastes?

**SPIDLE:** I'd like to stay with Governor King for a moment. I'm interested in his sensitivity to this whole issue. The winds were beginning to blow nationally in the press Earth Day and so on. Was that the essence of his awareness, perhaps?

**GORDON:** Carroll Cagle was a press agent and advisor to Governor King in that campaign. I've always thought Carroll had a lot to do with that. He later became an assistant to Senator Clinton P. Anderson in Washington.

**SPIDLE:** That does say something to the old rancher's openness.

**GORDON:** Yes, I enjoyed working with Bruce King. He let us do our own thing, which I like. On the other hand, I think Garrey Carruthers was a great governor, and he kept on top of everything. I never attended a King cabinet or staff meeting; Bruce King dealt one-on-one, and didn't have staff meetings, whereas on Garrey Carruther's first day we all got together and were told we'd have a cabinet meeting every Monday morning at 8:00, and that being there on time was a career decision. We took him seriously. If he had to be out of state, Maralyn Budke, Carruther's Chief of Staff, was there running things.

**SPIDLE:** I'm very interested in the cooperation and alertness of the political authorities there in Santa Fe, and then the important recognition of your professional capability to handle the job.

**GORDON:** Well, that's definitely the way Bruce King worked. He was always very supportive. In those days he didn't even always have us clear with him what we were going to do. We made proposals that went straight to the legislature. I'm not sure that was a good idea, by the way. It didn't happen to me, but this led at times to instances where different people from the same administration would show up at the same legislative hearing with varying testimony! I enjoyed Bruce King being very laid back, and I think he was often brighter and more tuned in to a lot of issues than he was given credit for.

**SPIDLE:** I have a question about the relationship of what you did in Albuquerque and then moving up the hill to Santa Fe. Is it oversimplifying to say, Well, the creation of the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department was, in a way, sort of a template, and then I went to Santa Fe and just plugged it in there?

**GORDON:** To a significant degree, but there are very important differences in what the state should do and what a community should do. States should deal with issues of a statewide nature that cannot be best addressed by local government. For example, state government can best address water pollution in the Rio Grande. Also, the state can do things that require specialized personnel that they can spread thinner around the state; for example, having real expertise in radiation protection, where maybe you don't need that many people and maybe local government can't provide them. The state should also and they lost track of this over the years have a role in training and consulting with local governments and recommending standards for local governments. That role has now been lost, and there's not much cooperation between the various state EPAs (they're called different things in different states, including New Mexico) and local government. They're kind of operating independently.

**SPIDLE:** What was the relationship, in your mind at least, between what was done in Albuquerque and in Santa Fe, managerially and philosophically?

**GORDON:** Philosophically and managerially there's no doubt that there's lots of similarities. States can better do some things, and local governments can do some things better. Where you have a good local agency, they can do things like food protection best. Milk used to be a problem in Albuquerque, and the city administered a milk sanitation program that included all the dairy farms and processing plants anywhere in the state that shipped into Albuquerque. Perhaps the state should have been more active during those years.

I think we had a good arrangement here in those years, though, because I felt, even when I was in Albuquerque, very close to the state people. I had worked there before, and we didn't have a competitive attitude. In fact, I used to go to Santa Fe almost weekly because we had so many common issues to discuss. That doesn't happen any more either.

**SPIDLE:** As you moved from Albuquerque to Santa Fe with a decade of experience and accomplishments and authority, it was immediately to your advantage that you had a chief executive who was supportive and willing to trust your expertise.

**GORDON:** Yes. Keep in mind that the first Governor I worked under was David Cargo. Dave was then, and still is, pretty unconventional. He liked to hold spontaneous hallway conferences and was very unpredictable. I remember being in his office one morning with John Jasper and the staff director of the Legislative Finance Committee, and they started arguing like a bunch of little kids. It was amazing to me how they were yelling and arguing with each other. I thought, Gosh, why doesn't the Governor have some control over this? (both laugh) But David Cargo was always hard to understand; to hear former UNM President Ferrel Heady's version of what happened on campus during the Vietnam riots, versus Dave Cargo's version it's like two different worlds.

**SPIDLE:** But you did find sufficient support and encouragement there to allow you to think of charging straight ahead.

**GORDON:** Oh, yes.

**SPIDLE:** And then with Governor King, the support was more explicit.

**GORDON:** Yes. I never felt there was any lack of support there, even under Cargo. We had an awful lot of leeway in those days to go ahead and do things we thought we ought to do, and with little or no interference.

**SPIDLE:** Because of the political leadership or whatever reasons, you had a lot of latitude to structure your own program and proceed as professionals. Then there's that other branch of government, the legislature. Maybe we can focus on it for a bit, and look at the related questions of money and personnel.

**GORDON:** No, not really. I never felt that I had concerns about legislators or the legislature, once things were approved in law. The key to it is getting various bills passed. Toward the end of my years in Albuquerque I was involved in gaining passage of the state Air Pollution Act. When I transferred back to Santa Fe soon thereafter, we held hearings and developed the regulations with absolutely no interference from the Roundhouse. We went ahead in the same way with water pollution, which I was also involved in. Later we got the state Occupational Health & Safety Act enacted, and we were strictly dealing with the legislature. Once we got it approved there was no pressure on what we did. Health issues were always viewed as, and treated as, professional issues.

**SPIDLE:** And there are obvious reasons why that would be so, but it is nice that, at least at that level, there is recognition that I don't want to appoint my cousin as a water engineer.

**GORDON:** Which has been happening more and more, and not only in New Mexico, but all over the nation. It's been a trend.

**SPIDLE:** There are several interlocking reasons why you were able to exercise your judgment to establish an emphatically professional organization that was, more or less, safe from political intervention and manipulation. One reason, clearly, is your record, your authority, your national credentials. Another reason you were relatively insulated, it seems to me, is you were riding a national wave of interest in Earth Day and such.

**GORDON:** Yes, that was helpful. The public had finally become aroused and concerned following Earth Day, although that happened in 1970, I believe, so we were not quite there in the Cargo years, but were, clearly, in the Bruce King years. Of course the first of these citizen environmental advocates we called them Tang ecologists (instant ecologists) -- sometimes their support was good, but sometimes they were extremists and ridiculous. For example, there was a fellow from Los

Alamos who showed up at a legislative hearing and said he's rather live in a cave with a candle than put up with the Four Corners power plant. That kind of thing didn't help our cause at all.

On the other hand, there were very competent people like John Bartlett, Chair of the New Mexico Citizens for Clean Air and Water. He always was very rational, very scientific, very well prepared, so that he earned the respect of industry as well as the media and public officials. So, it was a mixed bag, but the involvement of citizens activists was something new, a force to be dealt with. There were citizen activists following Earth Day.

**SPIDLE:** I'd like to stay with that issue a moment. In the early years, how would you judge the relationship of what you were trying to do, as a professional, and these environmental support groups?

**GORDON:** I would like to attempt to put it on a continuum to show that, let's say back in the 60's I was on one end of the continuum and the polluting industries were on the other. As years went by, and as things developed, if I were to try to place it on a continuum now, I would find industry closer to the middle, me closer to the middle, and many not all of the environmental activists on the extreme end.

You know, in the early days, industry was very uncooperative and many of them very polluting, and very powerful. I don't feel that way about industry any more. They've hired their own environmental health personnel, and they've recognized they're going to have to protect the environment. Most industries now, for economic reasons, have become more environmentally sensitive, whether it's a national food chain or Public Service Company of New Mexico.

In my manuscript I describe some of the early classical run-ins we had with Public Service Company of New Mexico and Arizona Public Service Company over air pollution, and with Molycorp over water pollution. They were very difficult to deal with. We'd always end our meetings with We'll see you at the courthouse. That was a lousy way of doing business unless you had no alternative.

**SPIDLE:** Obviously you can see it from their side, too: Who are these damn people trying to tell me how to run my business!? They're naturally going to be resistant.

**GORDON:** Oh, the other one that I mentioned was and it's a classic conflict now was the idea of locating a paper pulp mill near the river north of Albuquerque. They were shocked that anyone would see a problem with that. The city council was ready to construct roads and every other thing they asked for, but they ran into huge numbers of citizen activists and public health professionals who asked questions and demanded strict standards. We developed a standard that was ten times as stringent as they were first willing to meet! They finally agreed to meet the standard. However the attitude of the business community was very different from an earlier time when both the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce and the Albuquerque Industrial Development Council suggested I should be run out of town on a rail. On the issue of the paper mill, both those groups also opposed the proposed project.

**SPIDLE:** Let's back up before we get too far ahead. We were talking about you and your professional efforts in creating an agency in Santa Fe and the environmentalists who are, maybe, just as often a problem as they are useful supporters.

**GORDON:** In those days some of them were very helpful, and I would, again, mention John Bartlett of Los Alamos, who continues to be very sound, rational and scientific, well-prepared no matter where he goes to testify. Others just shoot from the hip, and will even tell you that, when it comes to a battle, they'll use any information they can find; it has nothing to do with facts. It has more to do with emotion, and they can be very disruptive. And I would say, now in 1999, all these years later that they are more of a problem than a help, and they have also helped gain approval for some measures that have very poor science behind them.

Just this morning I received an email from an associate who's a private consultant in New York state, and he commented on the money we waste on misguided efforts on asbestos control and radon, because of the poor science behind it. et the activists push EPA into it. There's a truism that a program in motion tends to remain in motion in a straight line, unless impeded by an equal and opposite force. These things get started and then, to make it worse, you start getting private industry consultants making their livings dealing with that program or law, thereby adding to the difficulty of exerting an equal and opposite force. We've done some awfully stupid things in the environment as far as having good programs based on good science.

**SPIDLE:** That's very interesting. I'll have to do a little special research, but I certainly want to come back and get your views on asbestos and radon, because here you present those in the context of shaky science and misspent money!

**GORDON:** Absolutely! In fact, there was a survey done by a Washington-based group, seven or eight years ago, of a thousand public health scientists in the country, which concluded that 85% of our money for environmental protection is spent on the wrong priorities.

**SPIDLE:** Eighty-five percent!! To say 25% would be shocking.

**GORDON:** We do some really dumb things. Initially, we didn't, when we were just doing basic, sound air pollution, water pollution, radiation protection and so forth. But we keep tinkering with it and tightening it up and adding more requirements and more bureaucracy, more paperwork. It really doesn't get much bang for the buck.

**SPIDLE:** That's discouraging.

Let's get back to the environmental groups. You indicated that when the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency was created, there was no real input from them, but what was the first issue over which they began to

**GORDON:** Air pollution. We first began hearing from them regarding air pollution issues, and I think that caused the legislators to be very confused, and probably pushed them further toward siding with industry, which came across, in balance, as being the more reasonable and responsible.

**SPIDLE:** Yes. The immediate assumption is that you're going to enlist all this environmental support that's being stirred up, but it's actually, at least as often, counterproductive.

**GORDON:** I've had to learn over the years that these groups do not represent the public. They pretend they do, and the news media pretend they represent the public, but they give some off-the-wall environmental group more space than they do the leading international scientists the Nobel Prize winner or such. It's amazing how much space they'll give them when they often not always, but frequently don't know what they're doing.

When I read these reports right now there's something called the Washington Study Group, and they're always coming out with statements about national environmental issues it's a red flag to me to go look at the basic science before believing them. Then I frequently don't believe them. They have their own agendas, march to their own drummers, and do NOT represent the public.

**SPIDLE:** And the special danger is they compromise the cause they're supposedly supporting.

Let me look at the other end of that spectrum: the so-called bad guys, the polluters (or whatever label you want to use). We already have on the record one element of their resistance -- for the first time, government is really stepping in and trying to interfere with them in areas where they've been free to make their own judgments.

**GORDON:** Yes. In New Mexico we were doing some things in the City of Albuquerque and County of Bernalillo before the State's air act was passed, but we were dealing with sand and gravel operations and open burning, and very basic local problems in those years. But, we weren't really having to cross swords with major industries like mining and energy, which was different. Previously, they had not had to deal with government in that respect.

**SPIDLE:** Well, they're powerful in the sense that they're large, important economic agencies. How tangibly did you feel their power? Would you get direct communications?

**GORDON:** Oh, yes, sure. I got to know all their leading lobbyists very well, from oil and gas, mining, milling, timber, cattle growers, farm bureau, telephone company; you name it. They were a very powerful group and they all had good, well-respected lobbyists in Santa Fe, who'd been there for years. It's hard to get someone from the east side to do something that Fred Moxey, the Executive Director of the Oil and Gas Association didn't like, or that Bill Saffold of Kennecott Copper didn't like, or Peg Parsons with the Homebuilders didn't like. The expression was, We can't live with this. So if you could deal with them and finally get them to show up and say, Well, we've met and now we can live with it, then you could get it approved by the Legislature. Those are very powerful highly-respected people.

**SPIDLE:** Within that group, were there any particular industries you felt were especially recalcitrant?

**GORDON:** Probably in the early days the power companies were the major ones. They were the ones that were going to be affected the most, and they were some of the most obvious and the most powerful. We found, over the years, that Arizona Public Service Company, which had a major holding in the Four Corners Power Plant, was the most Neanderthal-minded group to deal with. The Public Service Company of New Mexico, under the then-leadership of Jerry Geist, started evolving rapidly, and we got to the point where we could actually deal with PNM. And when we would meet with PNM, we didn't always agree, but we knew where we stood. If Jerry or his representatives finally said something, we knew we could count on it. We didn't need it on paper. They were people of their word, and if they said, We'll do that. We'll agree with you. We'll meet this standard or whatever, we felt we could rely on that.

**SPIDLE:** In a way it's a testimony to the effectiveness of the American political process that over the years you're able to drag the polluter groups toward the center and also even maybe the hardest most constructive elements.

**GORDON:** Yes, and there are a lot of constructive elements. It's a mixed bag when it comes to the citizen groups. Some of the worst these days, in my opinion, are, for example, this group called CARD in Santa Fe, which I've never had any dealings with Citizens Against Radioactive Dumping which was one of the forces that held up the opening of WIPP for years. And all they're really after is preventing the nuclear fuel cycle, so they will attack it at any point they can. And they'll admit it! And if that point happens to be transportation or containers or WIPP I am writing a paper to present in a couple of weeks in Chicago in which I am relating some of my early-day experiences as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service, monitoring fall-out from nuclear testing in Nevada, to turning swords into plowshares at Project Gnome near Carlsbad, NM. Now we need to get the public to support irradiation of foodstuffs. That would be a major public health advantage and would reduce the number of cases of food-borne illnesses in this country by thousands every year, plus increasing the shelf-life of many types of foods, reducing spoilage, etc. It's just another thing we have to keep fighting for, but there are groups opposing it all the way.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, it's just an emotional reaction: You're going to do WHAT to our food?! You're going to irradiate it?! We've talked about how, locally, there are elements of the national environmental movement that are a two-edged sword in terms of what you were trying to do, and if the opposite end of the spectrum the polluters I gather, were easier to deal with

**GORDON:** Well, not initially. We had some real knock-down, drag-outs with these groups when we first started meeting with them, and we were miles apart in our expectations and what we were recommending as standards. So, looking at it on a continuum basis, I was undoubtedly closer to what the then-activists were. Over the years, a lot of things have changed. Industry's attitude has changed remarkably, and there are some sound activist groups as well as some that are still out on the fringes making a lot of noise and really creating problems.

**SPIDLE:** Two other dimensions of this whole general subject that I want to get on the record today, and then go on to a discussion of the Laboratory next.

First, and as a New Mexico state employee via the universities system, I'm always conscious of this: it seems to me we never have enough money or personnel to do what we want to do, and I know you couldn't have had everything you wanted. But I gather that this was not a major limit to you as you tried to set up that agency.

**GORDON:** No, I never felt it was a major factor. For the most part, I thought the professional personnel accomplished the things we were assigned to do. There were a few things I wrote into the original law that were never funded. One of them was environmental chemicals, and I finally decided to ask the legislature to take it out a few years later because we had a responsibility but zero budget for it. I felt that we were going to get in trouble on that. Now, since then, pieces of the toxic chemicals problem have been included under community right-to-know, hazardous waste management, and other legal approaches.

But I thought we had enough people. I mentioned in my manuscript an amusing sidelight: The budget analyst for the Legislative Finance Committee, Waldo Anton, had been the fiscal officer for the old Department of Public Health in the 50's, so I knew him pretty well. When we got together we discussed the budget for the Environmental Improvement Agency and how it related to what we were already spending for the Environmental Services Division and what we should change, Waldo made a mathematical error that allowed us to hire another twenty or so additional personnel right off the bat! He had put an extra \$300,000 in, which doesn't sound like a lot today, but it was big bucks then. Since it wasn't my mistake, I never tried to correct it during the legislative process, so we were able to hire additional personnel.

**SPIDLE:** It's interesting that you always felt you had at least sufficient funds to meet your responsibilities in the agency. How, legally and structurally, did you insulate your personnel from the political process? Was there a Hatch Act or something similar?

**GORDON:** The way the law was set up, I was the only exempt employee in the environmental health part of the Health and Social Services Department I can talk about the public health part, too, if you'd be interested until the cabinet-level system of government was formed when Jerry Apodaca was governor. Until then, there were only a few exempt employees. For example, the Executive Director of the State Health and Social Services Department Dick Heim was an exempt employee. I was an exempt employee. But other personnel in the Environmental Improvement Agency were not exempt, so that was not an issue.

When the cabinet-level system of government was created and it was very specific about titles it provided that the Cabinet Secretaries, and later the Deputy Secretaries that were authorized through the state personnel office, were exempt employees and the law specified that each Division would have a Director who would be an exempt employee. So that

increased the number of exempt or political appointees. Over the years, appointees have been both professional and political.

**SPIDLE:** But in terms of the legislation creating the Agency, it specifies who's exempt, and by implication everyone else is not.

**GORDON:** That's correct. Different governors have handled this in different ways. When Toney Anaya was governor, every position vacancy came across some desk in his office, even if it was at one of the state hospitals, so he got deeply involved in trying to politicize the whole process. It may appear that you could completely insulate personnel via the law, but realistically, if the governor wants to play games with the system, it can be done.

**SPIDLE:** The second and last general area I'd like you to consider is the relationship between what you were trying to do here in New Mexico in the late 60's and early 70's and the federal authorities. The notion that They did this in Washington and we have to follow their lead and develop something here in New Mexico is clearly erroneous in this case.

**GORDON:** Yes. I think it's probably safe to say that from very early days probably starting with the District Health Act in 1935 and up to today -- we have, in many ways, been ahead. There are some things other states do, particularly in other health programs that we never have been budgeted to do, but the things we do I think we do quite well. I think we were clearly ahead of the game on environmental health.

**SPIDLE:** As you tried to set up this agency in New Mexico and develop programs, how would you characterize the relationship monetarily, programmatically between what you're doing here in New Mexico and Washington?

**GORDON:** We probably had a better relationship with EPA when it was first created than they do now, for one simple reason. When the programs were in the Public Health Service, all the leaders of the programs were public health professionals, and we knew them all on a first-name basis, so if I wanted to call up the head of the agency I'd get on the phone and do so. When EPA was created, I couldn't get through to the Administrator. I tried on occasion. We had to deal with various underlings, but for the first few years of the EPA, a lot of their key staff were Public Health Service commissioned officers, transferred to EPA. They gradually retired or transferred back to some other program in the Public Health Service, so at this point it's very difficult to find anyone with any sort of a public health pedigree at EPA. EPA is still a public health agency, doing administering public health programs. But it's very difficult to find anyone with, say, a graduate or doctoral degree in public health; there are very few of them.

**SPIDLE:** Instead they're MBA's.

**GORDON:** Yes, and lots of attorneys. By the way, they all have their place. I don't think just public health professionals should run everything about health. We must rely on all sorts of disciplines and professions, but we do need a cadre of people who understand public health itself as a core body of knowledge. So, over the years EPA personnel gradually turned over from the first administrator, Bill Ruckelshaus, until today every EPA Administrator has been an attorney. And, regrettably, the national public health establishment and I continue to be a voice in the wilderness on this has taken the attitude that, Well, that's not in the Public Health Service; that's not public health. That's just not true at all!

Even the schools of public health, which I still work with, have largely stopped training people for roles like EPA. And if you go to an Executive Board meeting of the American Public Health Association, they want to talk about what's happening in the various important programs at CDC and other components of the Public Health Service, but seldom do they discuss the EPA budget or policies. The public health establishment is pretty much opting out of it, and we haven't had a cadre of public health professionals in EPA.

**SPIDLE:** I wonder if in other states the experience is the same; that because there a kind of common paternity in the U.S. Public Health Service, the early years of the EPA were different.

**GORDON:** Yes. And in New Mexico -- and this is something I'm very proud of, and it's history in the early years, at one point when my title in the merit system was Administrator for Health and Environmental Programs, my working title' was State Health Officer, because that's what was used in other states. I had personnel as Director of the Environmental Improvement Division who had an MPH; the Deputy Director had an MPH; every Division Director and District Manager had an MPH or closely related public health\_degree. It was clearly a public health agency. Today there are only one or two public health professionals in the districts, but none among the leadership in Santa Fe. They're all scientists: geologists or something, but they don't have the public health perspective that's really needed in that agency. And it shows in what they do.

**SPIDLE:** I would think that would be easy to document. But, having demonstrated it, what conclusions would you draw? But it's a very important shift.

**GORDON:** Yes, it could be done. When you consider that all the laws and regulations are public health laws and regulations, they have to be justified on a public health basis, and if you go to court, you have to present your evidence on a public health basis. It shows they have a real weakness, because public health is what air pollution and water pollution and other environmental health programs are all about. There are other aspects to environmental health; I don't mean to denigrate the recreational and wildlife and other ecological aspects. Those are important, too, but personnel without public health training usually do not understand the public health aspects.

**SPIDLE:** In this birth period you would characterize the relationship between New Mexico authorities and the people in Washington as positive and constructive?

**GORDON:** Yes.

**SPIDLE:** It's certainly not a matter of their showing us what to do.

**GORDON:** It became more and more that way over the years, to the point that the feds wanted to work on the states instead of with the states. I think that's the picture as I view it today.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, that's a better characterization. What I was getting at was, Where is the real [sic] tending to shift toward Washington.

**GORDON:** Regrettably, yes, and it's too frequently done as I coined the phrase years ago by some technocrat sitting in a cubicle overlooking the Potomac who doesn't have the slightest idea what it's like in New Mexico, and we get stuck with some of the things they dream up and later get included in some regulation, requirement or law.

**SPIDLE:** I think we've reached the issue of the establishment of the state laboratories, and have begun, at least, to look at the unified laboratory system. That's where I'd like to begin today.

**GORDON:** That was one of the issues in my second stint in Santa Fe that is worth discussion. As you know, we'd had the existing public health laboratories and organization since 1919 and, as I understood it, the lab that was on the UNM main campus was built about 1937. I started having very serious concerns about the quality and quantity of the work after Miss Greenfield retired, particularly the quality and quantity of chemistry work, which was somewhat new to public health laboratories. Public health, until after World War II, had been more microbiological than chemical, so in a way it was understandable. But there were also glaring problems in the actual proficiency and funding for the lab.

When we got the Environmental Improvement Agency created in 1971, we obtained a little additional budget to develop what we called an Environmental Chemicals Laboratory, ostensibly to do better work on the concern sometimes misplaced concern, but concern nevertheless about mercury in fish in some of the state's reservoirs. We didn't have enough money to start a lab, so my brother Ladd Gordon, who was then Director of the Game and Fish Department, had some unused space in a Game & Fish Department warehouse on Cerrillos Road in Santa Fe, where we set up a small Environmental Chemicals Laboratory. It worked fairly well for a limited number of analyses; we didn't have much equipment and, chemistry, particularly, requires millions of dollars worth of sophisticated analytical equipment.

**SPIDLE:** You were just ignoring the state laboratory

**GORDON:** Well, we started ignoring them on chemistry, not other things. We didn't have any choice on other things, though we still had concerns. On the other hand, they were operating in a cramped, vermin-ridden, rodent-infested building and the organization was understaffed and under-funded.

**SPIDLE:** And very poorly lead.

**GORDON:** Well, yes. Dan Johnson was a fine microbiologist, but not much of a manager. Anyway, a little later I was visiting with my friend Bud Ervin, City of Albuquerque Director of Property Management. Bud had been Assistant City Manager when I had been with the City (Albuquerque) before, and I'd gone to school with him. We worked out an agreement whereby we would enlarge the state Environmental Chemicals Laboratory and call it an environmental laboratory, and the City would furnish the utilities and an old barracks building at Montessa Park (where part of the City jails are now). So we moved the environmental laboratory to Montessa Park, acquired additional equipment and personnel, and it was functioning pretty well.

Then in 1973, I think, I made a proposal to Dick Heim, Executive Director of the Health and Social Services Department, which is in writing in my manuscript, and he approved it and I took it to Fred Muniz, the Chief Budget Officer for Governor King. Governor King asked Representative Jamie Koch of Santa Fe introduced the bill to build a new, modern,

comprehensive and I chose to call it scientific laboratory on the UNM campus. I obtained permission from the Campus Planning Committee and the Board of Regents to locate it where it currently is. The bill wasn't very popular during the legislative session, and at one point Fred Muniz advised me that they wanted to drop the idea, and they'd support it more strongly in the following session of the legislature. I didn't drop it.

In the interim, Jim Weston, the Chief Medical Examiner, had contacted me and we had worked out an arrangement where we would ask for enough money for a laboratory that would meet his needs as well as the health and environmental part of it. He used to call it the Tri-Agency Lab or something of the sort, although it was never officially called that. So I took the bill to the Legislature, and one night in the Senate Finance Committee it was given a do not pass.' I was very frustrated as I drove home, after midnight, back to Albuquerque. It wasn't really my job I wasn't the laboratory director -- but I was the only one taking an interest in it. I got up very early the next morning I was probably back in Santa Fe by 7:00 and contacted Jamie Koch, and got him to re-introduce the bill in the House. It went through, but we'd asked for \$5 million and by the time it got out of the legislative process, it was only \$2.5 million.

Then, during the construction phase, the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) had a Property Control Manager who let the construction project get completely out of hand, and the architect also let it get out of hand, and there were huge cost overruns. Strangely enough, the cost overruns became my problem rather than DFA's, so I had to return to the Legislature, and it certainly wasn't popular for a project to have had a major cost overrun. The incomplete facility was just sitting there, and sometimes I was tempted to say, Well, the hell with it. Let it just sit there. But I finally got it back before the Legislature. I remember one specific meeting when Senator Aubrey Dunn a really great guy thoroughly raked us over the coals, and then called a recess. Aubrey came up to me in the hallway --- he was quite a bit larger than I --- and put his arm around me, saying, Larry, what do you really have to have? So he played his political game for the media, and we went back in the hearing room and obtained approval for enough money to complete the construction.

Even then, there were some design problems that required that I return to the Legislature a third time for additional funds! The ventilation system wasn't designed properly for a complex, modern laboratory. But, we finally got it built. Dave Farrell and Dick Heim reallocated enough money from the Health and Social Services Department budget to purchase some modern chemistry equipment. We got a gas chromatograph mass spectrometer which was practically unheard of in state labs at that time.

The reason I had wanted to call it a scientific laboratory was that I had also organized it so that services would be available to other agencies on a cost-reimbursement we called it cost per relative unit basis. We had all our laboratory work divided up into how many units it cost and how expensive they were. So we made the lab available to various official agencies. It was, and is still, used by forty or fifty other agencies around the state. It is truly a comprehensive laboratory, as far as I know, still the only comprehensive state laboratory in the United States.

Somewhat separate, but in the same building, was the Medical Examiner's component. Later, after I left, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Veterinary Diagnostic Service set up a lab in the building, too. I understand there was to be discussion in the last Legislature, that the Department of Agriculture was willing to turn their operation over to the Scientific Laboratory people NMDA would still get the service but they apparently were willing to let the management and direction of be provided by the Scientific Laboratory.

Sometime after I got the laboratory approved, I decided, even though I was not a laboratory scientist, that I wanted to be Laboratory Director so I could organize it. I asked Dick Heim to appoint me to that position, which he did. Dick then promoted Aaron Bond to replace me as Director of the Environmental Improvement Agency. I spent the next three years organizing and orienting the Laboratory in accordance with the mission I foresaw for it. It's now one of the finer laboratories in the nation. I never told the legislators this, but after we finally got it properly funded, it was really better staffed and equipped than most other labs in the country.

When I first looked at the budget for the Public Health Laboratory that was merged into the Scientific Laboratory, I think Dan Johnson had a budget of \$250 per year for travel in-state and out-of-state. You can use that much going to weekly staff meetings in Santa Fe! So there were a lot of problems that had to be rectified.

**SPIDLE:** Again, why the careful selection of the name Scientific Laboratory?" Just to emphasize the size and inclusiveness?

**GORDON:** Yes, and to make it a little out of the ordinary and a little out of politics. Some people still call it the Public Health Laboratory, but it isn't. There's no other organization\_like it in the country. It serves all kinds of agencies: the Forest Service, the Game & Fish Department, some of the Indian tribes, the Indian Health Service, Planned Parenthood.

**SPIDLE:** Approximately what percentage of its work would you say is public health work?

**GORDON:** The last time I had figures and I think it's still the same it was about 45% environmental health and 45% other public health. The remainder is service for other types of agencies.

**SPIDLE:** So the public health component is still the major

**GORDON:** If you include environmental health, which you really should for a total definition, even though the agencies are separate. That's the proper way to look at it: about 90% of their workload is public health in the broad sense of the term.

**SPIDLE:** I was thinking of the insulating cachet of scientific laboratory.'

**GORDON:** I had that in mind, too. However, when Gary Johnson became governor, he fired such professionals as the State Epidemiologist, the State Laboratory Director, and quite a few others of that ilk, and a lot of us wrote letters and he finally re-hired all of them. But he viewed them all, just because they were exempt employees, as though they were political hacks!

**SPIDLE:** Ah, patronage positions!

**GORDON:** Most of those certainly in the areas I was familiar with and interested in regained their positions. It's a problem: you want an agency to have high organizational standards and visibility, but when you do that, typically, an exempt position goes with it!

**SPIDLE:** I'm not clear on the way OMI fits in the establishment.

**GORDON:** As we had originally visualized it, the OMI operation was to be in a separate part of the building, and we were going to do all of the toxicology for them and they were going to do certain other things. I believe, over the years, they are they're doing their own toxicology now. They've enlarged considerably, and they also built a tunnel under the parking lot to better connect OMI with the medical school (for transferring cadavers, etc.) It's a first class operation, but I don't think it ever achieved quite the amalgamation of laboratory work that I had envisioned.

**SPIDLE:** Yes. our notion was, This is another user.

**GORDON:** Well, there're still a few problems. The Agriculture Department in Las Cruces still operates an agricultural laboratory, and that frequently creates problems. A few personnel in the Environment Department have occasionally gone to the Agriculture Department for analytical work instead of the Scientific Laboratory. When you look at it on a cost-per-relative-unit basis, the more work you can have done in the Scientific Laboratory, the lower the cost-per-relative-unit. I wrote to Governor Johnson and his chief deputy, Lou Gallegos, just after Johnson took office, and pointed out that there were some serious relationship problems between the Laboratory and the Public Health Division, the Environmental Improvement Agency, the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, and the Department of Agriculture; there are a few other problems relating to relationships of these agencies with the State Epidemiologist. I offered to do some work for them, pro bono, to develop the necessary policies, because equals cannot coordinate equals, and you're not going to find one cabinet secretary coordinating another unless the Governor instructs them to do so or issues an executive order.

Lou Gallegos told me he wanted me to do this, but that's been four years or so, and it hasn't happened. They still have problems because of a lack of coordination.

**SPIDLE:** There are several other aspects of this that interest me. I don't know this I'm just guessing but the building in 1937 of the State Public Health Laboratory over there, cheek by jowl with the UNM Chemistry and Biology Departments, was clearly no accident, and was meant to suggest some close cooperation. I don't hear you being involved in those academic disciplines at all.

**GORDON:** Didn't happen. I was a biology major and chemistry minor there, and even had some classes in that building, and two of the faculty members Howard Dittmer, Professor of Biology, and Martin Fleck had their offices in that building. The Laboratory didn't occupy much of the building! I think a lot of it was utilized by UNM, but I never heard, as a student, a graduate, or a graduate assistant, of any coordination with Biology or Chemistry at all. I think I would have known if any such coordination had been happening in those days.

**SPIDLE:** Well, in the early 1970's you obviously coordinated with the UNM Board of Regents on the issues of space and location, but with no specific involvement of the Chemistry Department or

**GORDON:** No. There has been some joint effort, which I can't specify, in some research and some use of graduate students. You know, a laboratory like that would operate more efficiently, if they ever had to, on a shift basis: 24 hours a day or two shifts, at least because all that expensive equipment stays there all the time.

**SPIDLE:** Sure. There are also political dimensions of the centralization of all that here in Albuquerque. I think you alluded to that in your manuscript.

**GORDON:** Well, when I was a sanitarian in Silver City, Dr. John C. Mitchell hired my wife who was well-qualified as a laboratory technologist to run all the milk and food samples for that district of the state, and there was a small laboratory in that health office. Later on, probably during Dr. Leland's tenure, arrangements were made with the county commissioners in Curry and San Juan Counties to set up branch laboratories. That was a great idea at the time; transportation was different, and some of the problems were different. For example, there were large numbers of dairy farms in both those areas there aren't as many now so it was a logical move. But by the time we organized the Scientific Laboratory in Albuquerque there were a number of good reasons, in terms of quality control, supervision, cost & efficiency, why we didn't need those labs. The one at Clovis had a better purpose than the one in San Juan County. I spoke with David King, Director of State Planning and a nephew of Governor King. David always said the only difference between him and Bruce King was that he didn't have a certificate of election, but he had a lot of authority.

**GORDON:** Following David King's verbal approval, I announced plans to close the San Juan branch laboratory, and the sky fell in with pressure from the Four Corners Regional Commission, the Indian Health Service, the Navajo Tribe, the County Commission; you name it! Not as much because of the service they were getting, but because the lab had two jobs in it, and this became an economic issue! One of the employees, Laurel Christiansen, was the daughter of a County Commissioner, so that had a lot to do with it. The result was that when it exploded in my face, Bruce King said, I never told Larry he could do that! On the whole I had a great relationship with Bruce King, but that time he was just reacting to political pressure.

**SPIDLE:** Well, I'd intended to do it in some context, but maybe this is a natural one: I'm firmly persuaded and convinced that your essential identification has been that of a professional, as opposed to a politician-administrator or such. But you've obviously had to deal with all varieties of politicians, and it seems to me that, with the solitary exception of Bruce King, you've had better relationships with the Republican administrations of the state even the Albuquerque Republicans.

**GORDON:** I guess I don't think of it that way. Maybe I could go back and count on my fingers and come to that conclusion. I guess I had a good relationship with Dave Cargo, except you could never figure out what he was going to do next. So I don't know what you'd call any relationship with Cargo: good, bad or indifferent.

**SPIDLE:** What about Anaya? Apodaca?

**GORDON:** Governor Apodaca was a real problem. He was not supportive of any sort of professionalism, and I'll be glad to go into that if you wish. Later on I guess I had a crystal ball following the primary election when Toney Anaya became governor in the fall. He invited me to have breakfast with him at the Inn of Loretto in Santa Fe, and we had a good talk. He indicated he wanted me to be Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment. After the fall election, Governor elect Anaya had a staff member contact me for an interview. I asked Anaya a few questions and he asked me a few, and I decided it wasn't a fit. He probably decided the same thing. For example, I was then immediate past-president of the American Public Health Association and still had a lot of national duties, and when I asked him whether I could continue those, he said No. I asked if I could continue having an adjunct appointment in the UNM School of Public Administration, and he said, No.

Then he asked me what I thought about affirmative action, and I told him I'd always practiced it and was proud of it, and that I believed in hiring the best candidate, no matter what their ethnicity or sex. He said he didn't agree with that position, that he wanted to make up for centuries of neglect and discrimination. So, it was clear that we weren't a fit. About that time my former protégé and friend, Pat Kneafsey, who was then Director of the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, called and said he was going to retire. I've outlived all my protégés (both laugh). So I went back with the City for a second stint as Director of Environmental Health. But during the period that Toney Anaya was governor, I think there were seven Secretaries of Health and Environment, about sixteen directors of behavioral health, twelve or fourteen directors of health planning, four or five directors of the Environmental Improvement Division, several directors of public health. It was just a revolving door, and I would've been just another of those going out that door, had I not been lucky and gotten out of state government during Anaya's tenure.

**SPIDLE:** So it's not so much a matter of party labels so much as it is individuals.

**GORDON:** I think so.

**SPIDLE:** Although the suggestion could be made that the Democrats you've had to deal with, at least Apodaca, Anaya, and to a smaller degree, Bruce King have been more politically engaged in the department.

**GORDON:** Oh, yes. They wanted to have a lot to say about whom to hire and fire. One time I'd fired a guy from down around Lordsburg whose father was on the State Highway Commission, and Governor Bruce King called me, Larry, why'd you want to get rid of that ol' boy? and I told him, and he said, OK, I just wanted to know. When Garrey Carruthers became governor and had appointed me a cabinet secretary, he told me, There are two people I would like you to consider, and

when a governor says that, I figure it means hire them, not consider them. Both individuals later caused Governor Carruthers all sorts of problems. But I figured, two people out of 3,500 employees isn't all that bad, because a number of the employees were exempt, and subject to the approval of the Governor.

**SPIDLE:** You can be pure as the driven snow and retired!

**GORDON:** The governor wasn't adamant, but I got his message.

Regarding one of them, named Jones, the Governor finally told me, Don't ever let that guy come in my office again, Larry. (both laugh) Another one, Carla Muth, was good, but she'd previously made a number of enemies among the legislators. She made a lot of headlines. She did accomplish a lot! She had guts and backbone, and got rid of some administrators in several state institutions who were entrenched and incompetent. She had the ability to do it, and I don't know how many people would have but by the time she was nominated for Cabinet Secretary following my retirement, the Senate refused to confirm her. Governor Carruthers then appointed his Chief of Staff, Maralyn Budke, as Acting Secretary for a period of time. Carla Muth accomplished some things citizens of the state should be thankful for.

**SPIDLE:** I'm trying to think of three Democratic governors over your tenure: King, Apodaca and Anaya; and Cargo. There's not another Republican until Carruthers.

**GORDON:** As far as being knowledgeable, sound, and knowing-what's-going-on, there's no doubt in my mind that Carruthers was head and shoulders above the others. I had some problems with him this was the last time I was in Santa Fe, so we're getting out of sequence here. I was having some serious ideological problems with him, so I went to Maralyn Budke and said, I'm having these problems, and I'm not the governor, so somebody's got to go, and it's not going to be the governor. She said, Well, Larry, I forget the word she used; something like, he learns very easily. She suggested I make an appointment and discuss our differences. Governor Carruthers suggested we meet at the Governor's Residence. We visited most of an afternoon about different public health issues. We had distinct differences on such topics as requiring motorcycle helmets, trying to cut down on smoking, accident prevention measures and other issues, which, as a Republican, he felt were interfering with people's lives too much. But he came around on many issues enough that I felt comfortable with it.

**SPIDLE:** I noticed in reading your manuscript that you clearly felt comfortable and able to work professionally without significant political concern with both King and Carruthers, but the experience was radically different with Apodaca. And, you might as well throw in Ken Schultz in terms of the same kind of structural problem.

**GORDON:** Well, as I remember the sequence, Apodaca got rid of Dick Heim, and then brought in Fernando E. C de Baca, who was a Republican. And I don't care about party labels, I'm just describing him. He had been in the President's office at the Old Executive Office building as one of dozens or hundreds of presidential assistants, and I never could figure out why Apodaca hired him. He was a real problem for everyone. One time Pete Domenici told me, I think McNamara (Secretary of Defense) spit him out of a computer. Anyway, he was appointed as my boss I was Director of the Scientific Laboratory and the first thing he did, just in visiting the state, was to call and ask me to assume the position of State Health Officer, which he later changed to Administrator for Health and Environmental Programs, but with the duties unchanged. He was impossible to deal with, and certainly he wanted to fire me.

Then I have to bring in my brother Ladd Gordon, who was then Director of the Game and Fish Department. Jerry Apodaca had ordered Ladd to hire one of his buddies, who was totally unqualified to be an Assistant Director. Ladd already had two outstanding assistants; Bill Huey, who later became Director and Secretary of Natural Resources, and Bill Humphries who later passed away while helping the Mexican Ambassador on a deer hunt. So Ladd refused to hire the Governor's buddy, and the governor fired him. Ladd called a press conference and said the Game and Fish Commission had hired him and it would take the Game and Fish Commission to fire him. So, the Governor called an emergency meeting of the Commission in his office. Ladd found out about it and called the departmental attorney George Harris, I think his name was in Albuquerque. According to the story, 30 minutes later George Harris was in the governor's office and Apodaca said, What're you doing here, George? and Harris said, I just came along to keep things legal around here.

The Game and Fish Commission met and refused to fire Ladd. In the meantime, according to one of Apodaca's political cronies, Alex Armijo, the governor had received forty-some thousand telegrams from the organized sportsmen groups around the state. Apodaca later told my brother that he might have prevented him from being reelected with all that opposition, But by God, I'm still governor.

There was another interesting aspect, which I wouldn't want in a book: There was a young game department patrolman which means an entrance-grade law enforcement officer in Las Cruces named Jim Montoya. He was a nephew of Apodaca's, and he told my brother, Ladd, Don't ever go in the Governor's office again without wearing a sidearm. Ladd followed his advice. Shortly thereafter Ladd retired and for a time went with the National Rifle Association and later, for

many years, was Regional Director of Ducks Unlimited. I have to bring in the issue about my brother, because that was one of the reasons Apodaca disliked me. (Many years later, Bill Montoya was appointed Game and Fish Director.)

One morning I went into the Governor's Office and he was sitting there with his hand like this (gestures) and I said, Governor, what's the matter? He said, Oh, it's all that Ladd stuff. I said, Can't you look at me and not think about my brother? He said, I'll never do it again, and he didn't, or never showed it. But he told Bob McNeil, one of his political cronies and also the departmental attorney for Health and Social Services, that he was going to fire me, and Bob said, No, you'll have another Ladd Gordon incident. That wasn't really true, because public health people aren't organized and supportive like sportsmen.

**SPIDLE:** At some point, maybe toward the end of our conversations, I think we ought to talk specifically about your brother. He plays a significant role in the history of modern New Mexico, too.

**GORDON:** Yes, and we worked together on a number of things, like the State Laboratory and the New Mexico Water Pollution Control Act, which he was interested in for fish and I was interested in for humans. We worked together in gaining enactment of the New Mexico Water Pollution Control Act.

**SPIDLE:** As you said earlier, we've rather blurred our chronology, but that's OK. It seems to me that as your career matured, you had to worry more about politics than back in the early days when you did pretty much what you pleased.

**GORDON:** Yes, I did. In thinking about this interview, I went through that manuscript again and I thumbed through the pages of those news clipping albums, and it reminded me that, frankly, particularly when I was with the City, I did everything I wanted to from a professional point of view without bothering with approval, without checking; I just did it. There are a lot of examples: different ordinances

**SPIDLE:** Let's start with the smoking one. That was so early!

**GORDON:** The smoking policy. I started that when I was Director of the Scientific Laboratory System: I prohibited any smoking in the laboratory, and that caused some people to have fits, particularly our chemistry division director, Curt Coleman, and he promised to sue me, resign, etc., but never did. Then when I went back to Santa Fe as State Health Officer and administered the Environmental Improvement Agency, Health Planning, public health, and the Laboratory, I implemented the same policy which, particularly in the Environmental Improvement Agency caused a number of people including a longtime protégé of mine, Cubia Clayton, now retired in Carrizozo to promise to sue me. No one ever sued me. A couple of people told me years later that that caused them to quit smoking, and they thanked me for it. The smoking policy has been broadened and improved since then, but we had to start somewhere.

**SPIDLE:** Well, you were fifteen or twenty years ahead of the curve as far as that was concerned.

**GORDON:** We were also ahead of the curve on air pollution control in Albuquerque. We may have been one of the first cities in the nation to get an air pollution ordinance. Another thing I was thinking about the other day: when I began noticing the shoe-fitting x-ray machines around town, I wrote a letter to all the shoe stores to get rid of them. And they did! No ordinance, no law. When we heard that children had been suffocated by plastic garment bags elsewhere, I wrote a letter telling dry cleaners that plastic bags had to be perforated or couldn't be used. You just can't do that sort of thing anymore.

**SPIDLE:** Partly because of the increasing litigiousness of our society, and its partially, maybe, an increasing distrust of government.

**GORDON:** That's true. I think there's another factor. I don't think anyone ever seriously questioned that we needed a state air pollution law, although there were many questions about details. But as the more obvious and significant environmental health problems have been solved, we get into things where the cost-benefit is ridiculous, and that's when people start asking questions. You're doing all these things and controlling my life, and how many lives are going to be saved? Sometimes it's one life for several hundred million dollars or several billion dollars, and then you're more apt to get a litigious reaction.

**SPIDLE:** Part of this also and this is based on your manuscript as well is the relationship between the environmental protection movement and the press, which was, early on, extremely positive, and then that changed over time as well.

**GORDON:** Yes. There were lots of factors at work: the advent of the citizen environmental advocates put a new balance in the whole thing; more, sometimes ridiculous, environmental laws. There's no question that I had unbelievable support for many years, until it was unusual when the press didn't support our actions or proposals.

**SPIDLE:** In your manuscript, it almost comes across, in the early period, that the press is a clear ally; in the later period the press is a clear adversary.

**GORDON:** Sometimes it has to do with personalities; not only in the agencies, but in the press. When Bob Brown was *Journal* editor, someone once asked him why he hadn't editorialized on a particular issue I was involved in, and he said, Well, Larry hasn't asked for an editorial. But when I was Secretary for Health and Environment, we were getting some bad press. I didn't mind as much as our not getting balanced press. I made an appointment with *Albuquerque Journal* Editor Jerry Crawford and asked about the lack of balance. He bluntly told me, We expect you to do all the good things you do, but when you do something we don't like we're going to editorialize. With that attitude, you can't win.

**SPIDLE:** I think I see the same syndrome operating in terms of relations with the legislature: more cooperation and partnership in the early phase of your career. Is it partially just a matter of them grinding you down?

**GORDON:** Partially. Partially my getting burned out. After thirty-eight years you get tired of fighting these things. Partially, more citizen and industry interest in given issues. For example, when I first appointed the Metropolitan Environmental Health Advisory Board, no one cared who was on it; I appointed who I wanted. When one of those slots comes open now the replacement for that organization today is the City-County Air Quality Control Board everyone wants a say. The activists are after it, the industry people are after it, the Chamber of Commerce

**SPIDLE:** That leads us back to our chronological flow, because it was the politics of Santa Fe that made you interested in coming back to Albuquerque in the early 1980's.

**GORDON:** Partially. I would say also, I had a difficult relationship with George Goldstein. When Bruce King became Governor the second time he called and asked me to meet him early one morning (it was still dark) in front of The Roundhouse (the capitol building). When I got there he was waiting in his Lincoln Town Car, and said he wanted me to be Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment. I was honored; I was Deputy Secretary then, and Goldstein was Secretary. I told Governor King it appeared I was going to become President of the American Public Health Association in the next year or two, and I couldn't do justice to both jobs at the same time. I recommended George, and the Governor said, I don't even know him, Larry, but he appointed him anyway.

George Goldstein was glib, personable, quick on his feet, bright; didn't know much about public health or environmental health, but he got along well politically. He always, I felt, distrusted me because of my earlier relationship with Bruce King. I don't think we had a particularly good relationship, on the whole, so it didn't bother me to see an opportunity to get out of there.

**SPIDLE:** In some ways, it was just time, especially because of that 1980-81 APHA focus.

**GORDON:** Yes, that's true. Let me mention something else, which I was reminded of by your book. You talked, correctly, about the early advent of county health departments in the state. I want to bring that up to date, because we had this situation in which we the state health agency would go before the legislature and make a budget request and they'd say, Well, you're partially funded by the counties. Why don't you go to the county? And we'd go to the county and they'd say, Well, you get money from the state, why don't you go back to the legislature? It was a no-win situation.

When I set up the Environmental Improvement Agency, environmental health field personnel had previously operated through funds budgeted for county health departments. I asked that all funds for environmental health field personnel be budgeted by the state, no county money, and I envisioned that the county commissioners would transfer the county environmental money into other public health programs. Well, it didn't work that way, so then I saw we had to set up an arrangement where the counties budgeted funds for county health department through the Health and Social Services Department so there was central, uniform budget control. (Dick Heim had a major role in arranging this.) Some years later we obtained legislative approval to change the budgetary system, so that now counties are only required to furnish the facilities and, I believe, the utilities. It was just not a workable situation. Today, what are called county health departments are really not county health departments. They're field offices of the state health department.

**SPIDLE:** That makes a lot of sense, and I can see how you were caught between the two funding sources.

**GORDON:** And the counties had little control over public health activities. All the public health employees were state employees, not county employees.

**SPIDLE:** Well, to Albuquerque in '82. That was the Harry Kinney administration, and Frank Kleinhenz, as I recall. What would you identify as the central focus of your efforts back in Albuquerque at that time?

**GORDON:** Reestablishing professionalism. Doing more training, planning, more program analysis. Program-wise, probably the biggest issue, and always controversial in those days, was air pollution and the advent of difficult EPA mandates about certain things at the state and local level. But as far as the staff goes, it was re-establishing professionalism, and I think we did a good job of that.

**SPIDLE:** In a way, that original, sound foundation established back in the late '60's had

**GORDON:** That had pretty well disappeared. I learned that you can sell a product, but you've got to KEEP selling it. If you don't, that product is soon forgotten. And in those intervening 15 years, roughly, the selling hadn't continued. For example, I had organized a City-County Environmental Health Department, as I mentioned before. In the intervening years most of that had disappeared, although some of the city-county functions were still being administered by the City. It remains a constant issue to this day; there's always competitiveness between two agencies in the same geographic area.

**SPIDLE:** I read with great interest your discussion in your manuscript of the air pollution issue, you chomping at the bit and protesting bitterly the science of the Washington perspective, which didn't fit our local problems.

**GORDON:** Yes. It didn't fit. The science was poor, and remains poor. I'm still convinced, although inspection and maintenance on automobiles has been well-accepted, most all of the improvements in automobile emissions have come about courtesy of federal standards for automobile manufacturers, with only a very small percentage of improvement caused by local inspection and maintenance programs. Most of the newer cars, unlike the old V-8 engines we used to have, don't run if something is out of kilter. Little four-cylinder engines are what you typically see on the streets, and fireplaces and open burning have been pretty well controlled now.

I have a book I frequently refer to: *EPA: Asking the Wrong Questions*. It details some case studies and shows how federal standards tend to be politicized one way or the other. Everyone wants a crack at them: the Office of Management and Budget tells them to do one thing, the citizen environmentalists want them to do another, and various congressmen, states and industries get involved. And the decisions don't necessarily end up on the side of science. Sometimes the standards end up ridiculously too stringent, sometimes not adequate.

**SPIDLE:** As a member of the public, I hadn't thought about that question the way you made me think about it in your manuscript. The gut response is, Of course it's a good idea to control emissions, but in terms of cost efficiency it might not pay and might not even address the real element.

**GORDON:** I'll have to send you something I think I have in my files, about what different people think about controlling some very toxic substance that causes thousands of deaths a year. It goes on about it, called oxygen di-hydrogen. I think you know about it.

**SPIDLE:** I think I do. Isn't that H<sub>2</sub>O? (laughing)

**GORDON:** Yes. It provides an interesting way of looking at things.

**SPIDLE:** Another thing I'd like to discuss today is that extraordinary national honor and responsibility, 1980-81, the presidency of the APHA. By the way, you don't have a list of all the presidents of the APHA?

**GORDON:** I do, up to a few years ago.

**SPIDLE:** I've never seen such a list, but it's my guess there are some real luminaries along with Larry J. Gordon on that list, and I'd like to see it if you run across a copy.

I know you joined the APHA as a pup of a boy. We've already in our discussion covered a lot of your involvement with the association

**GORDON:** I started getting interested in national issues in the mid-1950s, about the same time I applied for a reserve commission in the U.S. Public Health Service. I saw that as a way to get extra training and experience. I joined several organizations, and APHA was one of them. Fortunately the city is very generous, then and now, about out-of-state travel, much more so than the state. In fact, the city has a better budget and more professionalism than the state. I gradually started getting involved nationally and was asked to present papers at conferences. Then I began to be appointed to some key committees, and that was very enlightening to me, the contact with my peers around the country. They were nearly always better known and working in larger cities. I was finally elected chair of the APHA Section on Environment, which was one of the earliest sections of APHA. APHA was formed for the purpose of promoting personal and environmental health.

The APHA has about 55,000 direct and affiliate members. I don't want to mislead anyone, but nearly half of those are members of state associations, and become affiliate members of APHA via their state memberships.

I continued being a member of various national committees, and enjoyed it. I never tried to get elected to anything, but I found out I was being mentioned for president, and never campaigned for the position. Typically when you're nominated to be president of APHA you're supposed to hold parties and contact people, but I never did any of that. I was running against a very well-known professor of public health at Johns Hopkins who'd done a lot of pioneering research in public health. He probably should've been elected, but I won. I don't know what the vote was; never asked.

It was a great experience. I had the opportunity to present papers at most of the states affiliates and with a number of similar professional organizations, and testified several times before congressional committees on different issues.

**SPIDLE:** It's now almost two decades since you held that position. What would you identify as the most conspicuous accomplishment of your tenure? What were the major issues of that year of your presidency?

**GORDON:** We were still tinkering in very significant ways with the Clean Air Act. It was either during that year or the year I was president-elect that I testified on the Superfund legislation and on family planning authorization, and later on nutrition.

**SPIDLE:** How does that work, then, structurally? You're vice-president or?

**GORDON:** You're president-elect for a year, then president for a year, then past president the next year. And you're on the Executive Board. Actually, I think I was on the Executive Board for at least ten years before becoming president-elect.

**SPIDLE:** It doesn't surprise me that you were selected in that organization, but I'm wondering about other elements? Do they rotate the leadership around the country?

**GORDON:** More now than then. It's a very politically correct organization, and they try diligently to rotate it and make sure they get diversity in the leadership. They might have two women or two minorities run against each other to be sure one wins. That wasn't as true in earlier years. To show my own political stripes, it's become a more socialistic organization than I really identify with anymore. Also, they've lost track of the important differences between public health and health care, and that's a very basic thing to remember, because public health and health care are both very excellent commodities, but are always in competition for the budget dollar.

**SPIDLE:** That's one of the big areas will talk about next time, if you please.

In listening to you, I'm reminded of something in the manuscript that surprised me, relating to your presidency year. It was in the middle of your tenure, wasn't it, that Ronald Reagan appointed C. Everett Koop to the surgeon general's post, and you had no hesitation in your manuscript in lining up with the opposition. He's a folk hero now!

**GORDON:** I think I started some of the opposition. Our Executive Director, Bill McBeath, an MD MPH formerly from Kentucky who I've always thought the world of, happened to be in England when Koop was nominated, so I started that ruckus, and I didn't mind sharing the ruckus with McBeath because he could say things as an MD talking about another MD and get away with them better than I could. And he didn't mind doing it, and I've quoted some things he said. In the ten months that we and other groups and Senator Ted Kennedy kept Koop's confirmation pending in the Senate, and newspapers across the country (and his Koop's own hometown) editorialized that he was not qualified to be a surgeon general of the United States Public Health Service, Dr. Koop learned a lot. Years later, the APHA gave him an award, because he was indeed a great surgeon general, but he didn't start off that way. I think that ten months period of sensitization really helped.

**SPIDLE:** If you hadn't been chewing on him, maybe he wouldn't have learned enough to be

**GORDON:** es, we like to think that that really flustered him. You mean being a world-class pediatric surgeon isn't good enough? Well, that's not what public health is. I knew one of his chief deputies very well he was another Public Health Service officer named George Hardy, an MD MPH from CDC assigned to the Surgeon General's staff and George said it was very difficult to keep Koop on track. But he came across as the nation's chief doctor, and did some great things.

To get the other side of public health, President Reagan appointed Ann Gorsuch as EPA Administrator, and she was a complete failure in every way. She nearly wrecked EPA. One of her chief deputies was indicted, and there were all sorts of problems.

**SPIDLE:** I was struck by the fact that C. Everett Koop is now in the pantheon, but at his nomination Gordon and the APHA were holding his feet to the fire!

**GORDON:** Yes, and it was over a qualification issue. It wasn't ideological. I think we helped him learn something about public health.

**SPIDLE:** One other things about that that strikes me, and I think in the manuscript there's a sideways allusion to A prophet is not without honor in his own land or some such biblical phrase. It clearly scored you no points in New Mexico.

**GORDON:** I doubt anyone in New Mexico knew about it. It wasn't an issue here, although it was in some newspapers around the nation and in some public health-type groups. Probably the ones fighting him as hard as APHA were the Planned Parenthood groups, but that wasn't our issue.

**SPIDLE:** I was alluding to the fact that this New Mexico country boy was selected president of the APHA, and it attracted little attention here at home.

**GORDON:** Not much, but you'll see if you go through those selected clippings I gave you today, it was written up in the papers here and Santa Fe and the *UNM Alumnus*. I think I got fair coverage on it.

**SPIDLE:** But Governor Toney Anaya

**GORDON:** He wasn't impressed by that sort of thing.

**SPIDLE:** Well, this gets us to the point I'd hoped to reach today: our return to Santa Fe and then your retirement, which seems very active to me. You're not doing a lot of fly fishing and backpacking and such! I don't see much of a down-shift, but I'd like to talk about that the next time we meet.

**GORDON:** In a way I've been more active perhaps more of a curmudgeon nationally by the way, than I ever could be while I was a public employee in New Mexico, because I don't measure my words or comments now. I always had to be a little careful as a public employee.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, because whatever your personal situation, you had to worry about your agency.

At our next meeting, let's spend some time on Ladd Gordon; on the Carruthers period; maybe you can fill in some dates for me; and the so-far ten years of your retirement. And then we'll follow this period with my doing some research and go back over our product and see what questions we may need to spend some extra time on.

**SPIDLE:** Since our last meeting, I've gone back and listened to the last tape and I'm up to speed. I know where we are and where we need to go. I think we can probably, preliminarily, wrap it up this morning. When we have a preliminary transcript to look at, each of us can read it over for obvious errors, but also I'd like you to read it with the thought that we might need to develop a given topic more fully. I will read it with that in mind, and with other questions that may occur to me as I read. We may then want a follow-up session together to finalize it.

**GORDON:** I don't want to put you on the spot, but did you indicate you wanted me to write a foreword for your work in progress?

**SPIDLE:** The last push on my public health book starts next month; I'm teaching this summer. But I am on leave through the fall, the explicit purpose of that leave being to finish that book. If you're interested in doing that, I can give you more details beyond the one-page prospectus, showing what the book will cover.

I made a fundamental error when we last spoke. We talked about your return to Albuquerque as Director of the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, and I think we got decent coverage of that. Having read your manuscript, I talked about things I'd learned there, but which weren't on our tapes, and that could complicate things for a researcher reading the transcript and not your manuscript. We may have left too much to the manuscript in talking about that last tenure in Albuquerque. Specifically, when Ken Schultz became mayor and you quickly decided you didn't like the direction of things.

**GORDON:** Yes, it was strictly political and, I think, sleaze. Both Schultz and his CAO, Gene Romo, exhibited it, and I never was sure why I was retained, because Schultz quickly dumped most of the professional department heads, even though they might have been there a lot longer than I, and brought in some of the Mayor's buddies. Schultz also hired most of the people who had run against him in the mayoral race, so he had City Hall full of political hacks, and it wasn't a pleasant place to work. We had some good accomplishments during that period of time, but I was a willing candidate when I was approached by Maralyn Budke, on behalf of Governor elect Carruthers, for being appointed Health and Environment Secretary.

**SPIDLE:** When the opportunity came to go back to Santa Fe, despite the two-hour commute, you were ready.

**GORDON:** Well, it was an opportunity; obviously anyone in any field would reasonably aspire to the highest position in the domain. I hadn't aspired to that, but when the opportunity presented itself, it would have been difficult to turn down. But those were good, productive years (in Albuquerque). We did a lot to re-professionalize that department, despite what was going on in city government. We instigated a lot of improved management practices, some new programs, and I think improved the department a lot. And it's still being improved. When Sarah Kotchian took over after I left she was, and is, a professional, and has continued to hire professionals. I don't think she has one person in the department who was imposed on her by any mayor. I didn't either, for that matter. Such political appointments have not been the practice as much in city government as in state government.

**SPIDLE:** I noticed a reference to that in our last interview session. You felt city government was considerably more professional.

**GORDON:** It really is. I suppose it's a matter of history that until the state Personnel Act was adopted sometime in the 50's, there were two contingents of personnel who'd move in or out of office depending on who was in power. Exceptions were the departments that were funded under the federal Social Security Act, because they had to have their own merit system, so there was a merit system going back into the 40's for the health and welfare departments. Those departments were removed from the political process, except for the directors, and even they were shielded because in those days they had the Board of Health and the Board of Welfare, each of which really had some authority. Most of the rest of state government was blatantly political, and I don't mean just the top jobs, but all of them.

**SPIDLE:** Certainly by the late 80's when you were asked to work in the Carruthers administration you indicated you felt there were no political entanglements.

**GORDON:** Governor Carruthers very politely suggested I appoint two individuals. He said he'd like me to take a look at them. One of them was Carla Muth, whom I hired as Deputy Secretary, and who had a lot of talent and accomplished a number of things, but she sure had legislators unhappy with her. Maybe that was the price for some of the things she did, because I delegated to her freely, particularly to oversee the various state hospitals. She accomplished major improvements in those hospitals, but when I left and she was appointed Secretary-designate, she wasn't confirmed by the New Mexico Senate.

**SPIDLE:** What happened to her?

**GORDON:** I don't know! I ran into her at Dave Salman's ranch at La Cueva two or three years ago; both of us were buying raspberries.

The other one Governor Carruthers was interested in my considering was named Jones, and was doing consulting with a company in Los Alamos. He'd worked in the Republican campaign, and was the other one I hired. Later on, Governor Carruthers got so fed up with Jones he told me never to let him come to his office again. (both laugh) Carruthers at least approached the subject in such a way that I didn't feel he was ordering me to hire them.

I've forgotten how many exempt positions I had in the Health and Environment Department maybe eight or ten and out of those Governor Carruthers only wanted a couple of people considered for placement. They weren't just political hacks either. Both had some useful skills.

**SPIDLE:** I gathered from your manuscript that that last tenure as cabinet secretary you'd be proudest of having established stability and professionalism.

**GORDON:** That's correct. In a few cases I was able to bring in or to retain some great professionals, and re-stabilize the department that had been a revolving door during the Toney Anaya years, which had completely demoralized the troops. All the divisions had been demoralized by the frequent turnover of directors.

**SPIDLE:** our tenure in that position was a long one about a year or so?

**GORDON:** About a year and a half.

**SPIDLE:** You retired in the summer of 1988. Why?

**GORDON:** I think I was burned out after 38 years of constant controversy with various legislative bodies and local and federal governments. I'm not sure I realized it at the time, but I think it was time for me to go. I've observed people who get in that

same psychological mode. I felt proud of doing what I went there to do, and really intended to stay longer. It was a very difficult for me to tell Governor Carruthers and Maralyn Budke that I wanted to retire. I think 38 years was enough public service.

**SPIDLE:** We need to get on the record this decade of retirement in which you've been able to enjoy yourself but also to keep some professional involvement.

**GORDON:** It's been a privilege in the last eleven years I had done a lot of publishing and been involved in various associations' state and federal and consulting, even while I was a full-time employee. But retirement enabled me to do a lot more writing, so I suppose I've had a hundred publications since retiring. I'm giving the keynote speech to the National Association of Local Boards of Health this month in Salt Lake City, and just did some consulting work and gave a major address at the annual meeting of Underwriters Laboratories in Chicago. I'm constantly involved in issues, particularly regarding education and training for public health personnel.

**SPIDLE:** That's been a consistent interest for you from the very beginning when you were on the receiving end of the education.

**GORDON:** Yes, and I still think it's a niche I fell into, rather than carved it out. I found people were receptive to my ideas or I had ideas I wanted them to be receptive to. Even yesterday I had an email from an associate who's Director of Public Health in Fort Worth. He wanted advice about competencies for training environmental health personnel because he's trying to get a new school of public health established. That enabled me to flood him with more things than he ever wanted to receive! I finally sent one more email at the end and said, Aren't you sorry you asked?

**SPIDLE:** But don't you think there's a mentoring impulse? I think everybody likes to teach to some degree.

**GORDON:** I enjoy teaching, but in an informal way. I've often thought I'd have something to offer if I could just have a seminar relationship with public health students, just to talk about issues, not in a canned or outline manner, but just issues that come up from students or me or from current events.

**SPIDLE:** When we bumped into each other, the comments of some of your associates stressed that mentor relation that teaching impulse that they clearly felt in their relationships with you.

**GORDON:** I think I've indicated in an earlier interview session that the things I'm most proud of in my career was developing personnel, developing agencies and developing laws and regulations.

**SPIDLE:** We need to get on the record the objectification and the public administration division the connection with UNM. It's in your manuscript

**GORDON:** There was an article in the *Albuquerque Journal* about my pending retirement in the spring of '88. Lee Brown, the director of the Public Administration Division called me. I'd never considered any appointment, but after a few days thinking about it, it sounded pretty good. It started off full-time teaching, but I decided I'd had already had a full-time job, and didn't want another. So we discussed it (and the salary) if I just placed interns, and I could place interns easier than most faculty because I had numerous contacts after working for city, county, state and federal governments. I enjoyed doing that, and I enjoyed my relationship with public administration. That division fell into some problems, and was actually in receivership. It was in great turmoil -- some serious personnel issues -- and I think maybe they've straightened them out. Zane Reeves took over about the time I left, and I think he's done wonders in getting it straightened out.

**SPIDLE:** Well at least they're not in the headlines any longer!

**GORDON:** Then I was again fortunate when Neal Mitchell, the chair of Political Science, contacted me for an interview, so I started doing the same thing for that department. I had the same freedom to have an office and a title and to speak and publish, so it's been a great experience to be with UNM.

**SPIDLE:** And that's a continuing relationship of ten years or more.

**GORDON:** It's been eleven years! Lee Brown encouraged me to go tenure track, but I thought that was ridiculous at my age. So I'm an adjunct professor in Political Science. Public Administration gave me the title of Visiting Professor at first, which wasn't really appropriate. People would ask where I was visiting from!

**SPIDLE:** There's a nice symmetry in moving from an arroyo north of where K-Mart is these days over to a special position on the campus.

**GORDON:** Yes, who would have thought it? I certainly didn't. I never thought in advance, or planned any new opportunities. I've always taken things as they come. I never intended to go into public health. It wasn't a career plan, but almost a last-minute decision that Dr. Scott or someone on staff suggested I might attend the University of Michigan School of Public Health and earn a masters degree in public health.

**SPIDLE:** As I look back, there are three or four things that immediately I realize we haven't talked about, and ought to. One is the subject of WIPP, which began during your tenure.

**GORDON:** Yes, it was started during one of the King administrations, sometime in the 70's, I think, were the first discussions. It's been a series of mostly emotional conflicts. I have alleged, and still do, that it should have opened ten years ago, but I think DOE and Westinghouse, the site contractor, allowed themselves to be put in the position of assuring zero risk, and there is no zero risk in life. So it's always given something for the anti's to pick at. The issue is not zero risk, but is it safe enough? That's true in anything we do in public health: not is it completely safe? We also have to look at the trade-off or net benefit. For example, it may be that there are potentially some health problems to chlorinating water due to the potential carcinogenic effects of chloramines as a result of chlorinating water, and maybe there is some health hazard there. But the net benefit is that it's preventing millions of deaths a year from communicable diseases.

**SPIDLE:** The principle involved is that they're going to quit giving out peanuts on airline flights because there are some people who'll have an allergic reaction to peanuts.

**GORDON:** Yes. And it's really important that we look at net benefit. Sometimes that benefit needs to take economics into consideration, because one of the best things you can do for an individual's or a community's health is to have a good economy and employed people with good payrolls. You can't have very good public health when no one's employed.

**SPIDLE:** The WIPP project, then, is not one in which you played a frontline role.

**GORDON:** No. It was not a central role. At times I became directly involved, particularly shortly after I became cabinet secretary, but I don't think my role became very public. I did have a number of discussions with the DOE and Westinghouse officials, and on one occasion had the opportunity to tour the site. I've said in public meetings that I wouldn't have a problem living next to the site or having my children or grandchildren live there, except for industrial noise, dust, and maybe industrial accidents, but NOT because of concern regarding radiation hazards.

**SPIDLE:** Two other things that occurred to me as I listened to our last tape: I would be remiss if I didn't ask about your remark that the American Public Health Association is becoming increasingly socialistic.

**GORDON:** Yes, I do think it has become more socialistic than I care to be. I think any association ends up representing the wishes of the members, and the membership basis of APHA has changed over the years to a more liberal, socialistic tendency than it had or was when I was first involved, when it was mostly physicians, engineers, sanitarians and public health nurses. I think they had a very different outlook on the world. They also were interested primarily in public health rather than health care..

Over the years APHA, and the national public health establishment in general, have shot themselves in the foot, as I continue to write and say, by losing sight of the important differences between public health and health care. They've gradually gotten involved in health care, which is damaging to public health, because public health and health care, while both very important, are in eternal competition for the budget dollar. When health departments have gotten deeply involved in health care, their public health efforts have been reduced.

**SPIDLE:** You may know Dr. Wilhelm Rosenblatt, who was involved tuberculosis campaign director or some such

**GORDON:** At one point he was head of the tuberculosis sanatorium at Fort Stanton and at another point at the one in Socorro. Later, he was in the Department of Public Welfare and the health department. He's a very valuable, knowledgeable, dedicated person.

**SPIDLE:** His career, I think, reflects what you're talking about. You can treat tuberculosis, but it's better to prevent it, and I think that's the kind of dichotomy

**GORDON:** You asked me, one of the times we discussed this, about some of my activities in the APHA, and I'm not sure I gave a very good answer. One thing I tried to do and to some extent did for a year or two was try to refocus efforts on the primacy of prevention. I did that in many ways through APHA and its affiliates. But that's what public health is all about, and that does not in any way say that health care isn't equally important.

Every disease or condition has to be evaluated individually to determine if prevention is better than cure. It's not a matter of just saying an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That's not correct. There are exceptions. Sometimes preventive measures, depending on the issue and the age of the person or population, are very expensive, ineffective measures. They're particularly effective dealing with communicative diseases, environmental conditions and younger people. As people and populations get older preventive measures aren't quite as important, and health care becomes increasingly important.

**SPIDLE:** This discussion of APHA and the dichotomy between public health and health care leads me to the New Mexico Public Health Association, which we've talked about in passing a number of times. I'd be interested in your evaluation of 40 years exposure and connection to that group. And be provocative. To an outside observer it seems to be essentially a sideshow institution.

**GORDON:** That's correct and really always has been in various ways. When I first joined the New Mexico Public Health Association in 1950, it was really the annual picnic of the New Mexico Department of Public Health. And that was fine; it was really a training course, and the various disciplines and professions involved there were six or eight sections -- had speakers and training, and that's what it was all about. And even though we had a president, the first speaker was always State Health Officer Dr. James R. Scott. Over the years it gradually evolved to get a broader membership base, and is no longer aligned with the official agency, but has, like APHA at the national level, has become, I think, mis-oriented to where they now devote disproportionate efforts to health care issues. For years I was very involved in the New Mexico Public Health Association and served as president. I no longer belong. It doesn't interest me; they're not doing the type of things I like to do. Long ago I found out I can do more to affect public health policy by dealing directly with Pete Domenici or Jeff Bingaman or EPA or CDC or the Public Health Service than I can by first trying to get my recommendations regarding policy approved by some association and usually seeing no results. It may become association policy and everyone's happy, but what happens to implement that policy is the question.

**SPIDLE:** One leads to the other, maybe.

**GORDON:** It should, but it doesn't always. Sometimes people just fight like hell within an association to develop some resolution or policy and then go home. That happens in a lot of associations, and I want to do what happens after they go home.

**SPIDLE:** But it was the fighting of the wars, even in the New Mexico Public Health Association, and certainly in the APHA, which eventually gave you the expertise, the connections, the clout to go straight to Domenici or CDC.

**GORDON:** Absolutely. It was a very desirable, useful experience. One of the best roles I ever had was to be president of the APHA, but it was considerably different in those days; it's been almost twenty years ago now! Having been president of APHA continues to benefit me professionally, and I sometimes use that in a letter I'm writing just to get someone's attention.

**SPIDLE:** I'd like to spend 15 minutes or so in a discussion of your brother, Ladd. I'd like to know personal details education, etc. I'm sure such information is available, but it would be nice to have a nice package about the two of you.

**GORDON:** Well, we were always very close. He was the older brother and, regrettably, developed the nicotine habit in his twenties and didn't give it up until he was on the slide downward toward emphysema, so that he died at 66, which I consider a premature death.

I may have mentioned earlier that I had originally thought I was going to get into game management or range management or some conservation effort, before I even knew what public health was all about. At one point, Elliott Barker, who was the longtime, well-known, colorful State Game Warden was invited by me, as president of Phi Sigma Honorary Biological Society at UNM, to give a presentation. I was a graduate student then, and told Mr. Barker that I'd like to be considered for a position in the Game Department. He said, Fine. Give me a call when you're ready. A few weeks later my brother, also graduating with a degree in Biology, decided he wanted to work for the Game Department and called Mr. Barker. Mr. Barker invited him to Santa Fe and hired him. I saw Mr. Barker later and said something about my still being interested in a job, and he said, I thought I'd already hired you.

Ladd was a career professional, starting off as what they called a patrolman, which is about as much an entrance position as you can get rather like my being a sanitarian in Silver City and became Assistant Superintendent at what was known as the bird farm at Carlsbad. Then he became a research biologist and developed a number of wildlife publications on the Gila Wilderness Area where he was stationed while I was in Silver City. Then, about the same time that I was hired into the state office about 1956, he was promoted to the Santa Fe office as Chief of Special Services, and later became Chief of Law Enforcement.

All that time we were working together on various issues, particularly water pollution. Then sometime in the late 60's he was appointed State Game & Fish Director, and held that position about 17 years, although by the time he retired he'd been with the department about 27 years. I'd have to check my manuscript for details of specific accomplishments. He disdained politics, however, and was always very blunt about resisting any efforts to politicize his department. The Game Commission, sportsmen and his personnel supported him. When Jerry Apodaca was Governor he ordered Ladd to hire one of his Apodaca's buddies as an additional assistant director, which Ladd felt the department didn't need. Ladd refused, so Jerry Apodaca announced that he was dismissing Ladd. Ladd held a news conference to say that he wasn't fired, that the Game and Fish Commission had hired him and only they could fire him.

Former State Land Commissioner, Alex Armijo, a confidante of the governor, told me that during this time, the governor was flooded with some 44 thousand telegrams protesting his effort to fire Ladd. The organized sportsmen's groups didn't like it. Governor Apodaca convened an emergency meeting of the Game Commission in an effort to get that body to fire Ladd. The Commission's attorney drove from Albuquerque to Santa Fe at record speeds to arrive at the meeting. When the governor asked the attorney why he was there, he said he was just there to see that everything was honest. The Commission refused to fire Ladd, so this made for a difficult relationship between the governor and the department head, but that's how stubborn my brother was.

There was a young Game Department patrolman named Jim Montoya in Las Cruces who was the governor's nephew who advised Ladd to never go in the governor's office without wearing a sidearm, which he was authorized to do as a commissioned law enforcement officer.

**SPIDLE:** Do you mean that literally?

**GORDON:** I mean that literally. And at one point the governor told him, You got all those sportsmen's organizations to keep me from being reelected, but by god I'm still governor.

It must've been difficult to work under those conditions, although I never heard him complain about it, but when he was offered a position with the National Rifle Association in Raton, he went there for a few years. I think his role was National Director of Conservation, but he was based in Raton rather than Washington.

About that time the NRA was going through a lot of debate about what their role was, whether it was conservation or something else as it has evolved today, so he accepted the position of Regional Director of Ducks Unlimited, and they allowed him to be located in Albuquerque. It was a national job, and he traveled nationally in that position, and retired from Ducks Unlimited in the early to mid-80s.

**SPIDLE:** I'm struck by the ways in which your careers were parallel in different bailiwicks of the state administration.

**GORDON:** Not by design. We used to commiserate with each other, How the hell did I get in the middle of all these politicians?

**SPIDLE:** I never met your brother, but when I hear you characterize him as stubborn I think I see the same kind of stubbornness in Larry Gordon! Who was more stubborn, you or he?

**GORDON:** I think he was more stubborn, but I was probably more blunt, didn't have that smooth approach.

**SPIDLE:** Oh, you'd call him smooth?

**GORDON:** By comparison. (both laugh)

**SPIDLE:** He referred to his opponents as eaters of loco weed?

**GORDON:** I've made unfortunate statements, and although I felt that one was somewhat accurate, it didn't help me any in my chosen career. I still run across some old (tape ends)

**SPIDLE:** are political!

**GORDON:** not a useful political statement to make and I probably shouldn't have made it, but considering I'm still alive and not economically deprived and so on, I'm glad I said it.

**SPIDLE:** You've used the adjective burnout in relation to yourself. Did that happen with him? Did he just finally get tired of dealing with Jerry Apodaca?

**GORDON:** I think after 27 years, working from an entrance-grade position to Director of the Department of Game and Fish, to have this continuing altercation with the governor undoubtedly made him receptive to another job offer. And he had a great national, and even international, reputation in his chosen career and was the instigator of some unique accomplishments in New Mexico.

**SPIDLE:** I know nothing about that aspect of state administration. I know nothing of the issues, but it occurs to me that this person who's a hero to the hunters and winds up working for the NRA might be seen by a psalmist as being too far over in that camp that sphere of the game and fish business. Does that make any sense?

**GORDON:** I don't know if it does or not. The game and fish business, as you express it that's an artful expression really is to propagate the game species for the benefit of hunters and fishermen. I think it's not only the conservation goal to protect, but also to provide game to harvest. For example, by ensuring food and resting areas for migratory waterfowl -- there are a lot of different measures, and I'm not an expert there will be more species to harvest, and that's what the hunters want. That department during Ladd's tenure I think it's changed since was supported by revenues from hunters and fishermen. They did get some money through the federal Pittman-Robertson Act, which required a tax on all hunting equipment sold, to be doled out to states for game protection measures. So no matter how you cut it, all the revenues were for the benefit of the sportsmen of the state.

**SPIDLE:** Well, that's an initial premise that wouldn't have occurred to me and that I wasn't aware of. My assumption would be that Game & Fish was to do two things: to serve sportsmen, but also to conserve, preserve

**GORDON:** That's part of it. Conservation, though, has the spin-off of providing more hunting and fishing. I think in more recent years the Game Department is receiving some state money. Also, they've been given some additional duties of enforcing the state endangered species act and such, which I think is appropriate. So their mission has broadened.

**SPIDLE:** But that's a latter-day development, isn't it?

**GORDON:** Yes, so it may tie in with the fact that now they're getting more state general fund money, whereas I heard Ladd make a speech when Martin Fleck was governor of Kiwanis or Rotarians, and I remember Ladd grinning and saying, We don't get any state general fund money, and we don't want any of that damn money! Because that would have placed the Department in a different role.

**SPIDLE:** You can imagine, I don't want my tax dollars being used so you can go murder deer!

**GORDON:** There's been a whole change of attitudes, too. I used to be an avid hunter, starting when I was seven or eight years old and killing turkeys, and my first deer when I was about eleven. I used to think it was a way of life and sort of a macho thing to go out leaving school to go deer hunting and it was widely done in this part of the country. I think a lot of people, like me, have no desire to do that anymore, and maybe it's an age thing. I'd rather go out and look at the wildlife than to shoot them. I used to hunt quail, dove, duck, turkey you name it. Ladd and I usually hunted together, and with our father!

**SPIDLE:** But wasn't it a rite of passage?

**GORDON:** I think so, but I don't think children still have that; they have other things. And thank god they don't; we don't have the game and fish resources to allow that sort of thing. I still do a lot of fly fishing, but I haven't taken a fish home in years; I always catch and release. I have no desire to take any home. I went fly fishing just last week, and released all I caught.

**SPIDLE:** I still eat some. Do you know Dick Etulain? He was in our History Department, one of the western historians. It seems to me that given the length of tenure and the centrality of your brother's role in game and fish in New Mexico, that there ought to be some graduate student who'd like to look at his life and career. And maybe talk to you directly.

**GORDON:** There are some records in my manuscript that were more or less obituaries published in *New Mexico Wildlife*, and there are a lot of other records. Also, there's a scholarship named in Ladd's honor that's awarded annually to a deserving student of wildlife management at NMSU.

In the manuscript I talk about the coincidence of my refusing to order Tukumcari Lake drained back in the early 1970's. I could not have foreseen that sometime in the early 80's the Tukumcari Lake was named the Ladd S. Gordon Tukumcari Lake Project in his honor. He was still alive at that time, but following his death I wrote letters to all the Game Commissioners pointing out that the Tukumcari Lake thing wasn't particularly significant, and that it would be much more appropriate if the La Joya Game Refuge was renamed the Ladd S. Gordon Game Refuge because of all the work he'd done involving it. He was involved in creating the Refuge, and I remember a major fight he had with the State Highway Department and the Bureau of Federal Roads to provide access from the new freeway (I-25) into the La Joya State Game

Refuge. Furthermore, our family farm and ranch had been right across the river. So, I alleged that his roots ran deep in that area, and such a renaming would be highly appropriate.

Today, if you drive down the east side of the river, starting with the Casa Colorado Game Refuge and going over to the Bernardo Game Refuge and down to the La Joya Game Refuge, each of them has a sign over it saying, Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Management Complex. All of them were subsumed under that banner.

**SPIDLE:** I thought you were going to say, If anybody out to have that Tucumcari Lake named after them, it's me! (laughs)

**GORDON:** No, I'm not looking for any lake. If I deserved any honor and usually these things are done after you've passed away, unless you're a great politician like Bruce King, I think it would be the State Scientific Laboratory, because I don't think it would be there without my pushing for its creation. But, history being what it is, people's memories are short.

**SPIDLE:** I'm going to talk to Dick Etulain, because there are always graduate students desperate for good topics, and it seems to me this would be a very good one.

**GORDON:** It probably would be, looking at the improvements and projects and progress during his tenure.

**SPIDLE:** And to play his career against changing currents within that whole sphere.

**GORDON:** Undoubtedly. I think that's very clear. I used to think everyone in the world went quail hunting the first day of the season, and that doesn't happen anymore. It's a change in societal attitudes and values.

**SPIDLE:** Yes, although there was a big splash in the national press when a Navajo football teams couldn't play in the playoffs because all the players were going deer hunting one weekend. That was big news because it was so unusual.

[Interview ends]