

HISTORY OF THE  
U. S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Interview between:

Nevis E. Cook, Retired Director  
of New Orleans District

and

Robert G. Porter

New Orleans, Louisiana

April 26, 1977

## INTRODUCTION

This is a transcription of a taped interview, one of a series conducted by Robert G. Porter, who retired from the U. S. Food and Drug Administration in 1977.

The interviews were held with retired F.D.A. employees whose recollections may serve to enrich the written record. It is hoped that these narratives of things past will serve as source material for present and future researchers; that the stories of important accomplishments, interesting events, and distinguished leaders will find a place in training and orientation of new employees, and may be useful to enhance the morale of the organization; and finally, that they will be of value to Dr. James Harvey Young in the writing of the history of the Food and Drug Administration.

The tapes and transcriptions will become a part of the collection of the National Library of Medicine and copies of the transcriptions will be placed in the Library of Emory University.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

TAPE INDEX SHEET

CASSETTE NUMBER(S) 1, 2, & 3

GENERAL TOPIC OF INTERVIEW: HISTORY OF THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

DATE: 4/26/77 PLACE: New Orleans, La. LENGTH: 110 Min.

INTERVIEWEE

INTERVIEWER

NAME Nevis E. Cook NAME Robert G. Porter

ADDRESS [REDACTED] ADDRESS U. S. Food & Drug Admin.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Denver, Colorado

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM 1939 TO 1972

RETIRED: Yes YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: Director, New Orleans District  
(If retired, title of last FDA position)

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INTERVIEW WITH NEVIS COOK  
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA  
APRIL 26, 1977

COOK: You know, the new law had just been passed in 1939, and it was the first time that Food and Drug had ever recruited any considerable number of people. No less a personage than the Chief of the Eastern District, R. M. Wharton, came down to interview me with his one glass eye. I could tell which one it was. I could see a gleam of sympathy in it. Anyhow, he and McKay McKinnon interviewed me. Wharton did most of it, and he had me go out and come in as if I were a Food and Drug Inspector, and he was the Plant Manager, which I thought was utterly ridiculous. I had barely heard of the Food and Drug Administration, but I did as directed. I came in and was supposed to get a certain bit of information and relay it to the office at night, and I explained my mission and he said, "I have an appointment and I have to leave", and I said, "That's perfectly all right. Perhaps someone on your staff can find the information I need", and he said, "I don't want them to be looking up stuff when I'm not here", and this wrangling went on for a while, and finally I said, "I left a line of people back at the pharmacy, with prescriptions to have filled, and I don't see any sense in prolonging this. Before I went out on a mission of this kind, I would surely have been told what authority I have to demand this, and I don't know anything."

He said, "Oh, you don't know what you're doing here?" I said, "I'm beginning to wonder." He said, "I'm still in character as the Plant Manager." I said, "I'm no longer in character as the Food and Drug Inspector." Well, when I went out I thought sure that I had blown that one. I just forgot about it. Damned if I didn't get the first radiogram I ever got in my life, telling me to report in Atlanta on a certain date--it was in the fall of 1939, I guess. So, I duly reported. It was \$2,000.00 a year, and in those days that was a lot of money. More than I could make at anything else. I had taught school for \$60.00 a month not too much before that, but that is how I got into Food and Drug. I got to Atlanta. We had quite an interesting group of people who came in at that time at Atlanta. I heard various stories about why they recruited so heavily in the South. One of them was that whoever was responsible for the decision wanted white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and where else is he going to get them in numbers except down in the Bible Belt.

PORTER: There might be something to that.

COOK: And the other was that the South was harder hit by the Depression, and they could get absolutely the top students in the class--they could get the cream of the crop--sort of.

PORTER: On that 2,000 bucks, huh?

COOK: On that 2,000 bucks, and just off hand I can remember a few of the people who came in with me--Al Barnard, Ken Lennington, Bill Swain, John Sanders, and Winton Rankin came very shortly after I got there--he came in from Seafood.

PORTER: Oh, I didn't know that.

COOK: Yeah, he was in Seafood before he came into Food and Drug, and Frank Clark came in at that time, I know. He didn't come in at Atlanta, so we had quite a few people who later rose in the ranks.

PORTER: Frank Clark came in as a Chemist at that time, because he switched to being an Inspector when I came in--in 1942.

COOK: Yeah, well the first time I met him was at an Inspectors' Conference in Washington, D.C., the first one I ever attended. I don't know how many others--although, just off hand, I could think of those. Most of them are retired; some of them are dead by now. Are you recording?

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: As you know, we had a new law at that time and nobody knew too well what the full reach of that law might be, and they were looking for good cases to establish precedents. That's what the courts look at most often. Having some other court decide the same question, and they wanted to make sure they

won the first case. But, when I first got there everybody was talking about that Elixir of Sulfanilamide incident. Expect you heard of it.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: It had just been completed. That's where they used the solvent that killed a lot of people. That was the big excitement that they were talking about, but just after I got there some firm brought out a batch of Sulfathiazole, which was about the second sulfonamide to come on the market, and they had dumped a drum or two of phenobarbital--a barbiturate--I'm pretty sure it was phenobarb, and some of the tablets--much of it--was barbiturates. The Sulfathiazole was given in rather massive dosage, especially the initial dosage, and although I never heard of anybody dying, I heard about some who slept a couple of days. But, we had to go out to individual pharmacies and go through the prescriptions if they carried that firm's brand--I think it was Winthrop--and see who got it, and check up upon the people. You can imagine a job like that for a handfull of people. When I first went there, there was practically nobody there, and there wasn't anybody there to do any training. You went out on one road trip with a trainer, and then you were an experienced man and you took a neophyte out on the next trip, but that was the first thing I got involved in.

Then, I got into one that still clings to my memory very much. Perhaps because it was one of the early ones. We had never done any work on crabmeat. At that time they used to pick crabmeat and ship it in barrels of ice--one barrel containers. They had back fin lump, claw and special. The special was whatever they couldn't put in either of the other categories. The name being coined by somebody with an ear to the marketplace, no doubt. The conditions in the industry then were truly primitive. They were, well I think the worst example was in one plant where they had everything from grown women to little kids picking meat on rough wooden tables, using anything from pocket knives to you name it.

PORTER: Is that right?

COOK: To pick the meat. They got so much a pound for the meat picked, and they were just throwing the shells and the guts and everything on the floor, and every once in a while a guy would come through with a wheelbarrow and shovel and would shovel up enough of it so that they could navigate around the place, and roll it right out the back door and dump it. There weren't any screens, and there was an old toilet near the back door, and it was reliably reported to me by one of the employees that one day some employee was sitting on the throne in there, lit a cigarette, and tossed the match over in the other hole, and the damned thing blew up. There wasn't any reliable list of how many flies were

killed, but he got off with minor burns, and, of course, shattered dignity. Things were really bad. It is the only food that I ever quit eating in restaurants for a while because after I saw how they handled that stuff I didn't want any.

PORTER: They weren't under the Seafood Inspection Service?

COOK: No, no. Shrimp was the only thing that was ever under it as far as I know. Actually one inspector quit and asked to be transferred to the Laboratory because he got where he didn't want to eat in restaurants, and he was a little bit afraid to eat at home. He just couldn't take it. Things were really bad in those days so far as gross filth in the food industry was concerned, and I think it was the first time that it had ever been given any attention by the Federal Government, and it never got much from the State or the cities.

PORTER: I guess until the new law was passed it really was pretty hard to do anything.

COOK: Yeah, I think so, and then I got very deeply involved in a device case. I think I'm the one that really built that one, primarily. Something called axine plates. I don't know if you ever heard of them or not.

PORTER: No.

COOK: Well, they were advertised on radio all over the eastern

part of the country, and they were two metal plates to wear in the heels of your shoes, and it cured a lot of ailments. They listed everything. It got to the point where I think the Post Office got a fraud order against them, and they couldn't ship them by mail but had to ship them by Railway Express, and, of course, we had access to the Railway Express records after that law.

PORTER: Yes, that made it easier for--

COOK: It made it relatively easy to find who got them, and I went out and interviewed people and got to see what they thought of it, and I quite literally saw people wearing them for everything from corns to cancer, and the astonishing thing to me was--and I was new to this business--how many of them believed they were helping. I saw one man flat on his back in bed with the thing strapped on his heel. He had had a stroke, and he believed it was helping him. Saw one man with a goiter--the biggest one I've every seen--and he said he believed it was helping him.

PORTER: That's why, I guess, they can sell anything because the people do believe in it.

COOK: So, you have to find somebody who didn't think it was doing him any good, but what made it difficult, in order to make it stand up in court, you had to find somebody who had been to the doctor and been diagnosed as having this

illness, used the plates, had been back to the doctor, and they were still ailing. So, you had to go that route in order to get convincing witnesses. I rounded them up some.

PORTER: Did you?

COOK: I found a lot of people that thought they were helpful and were not about to go to court. Some of them wouldn't even talk to you. Like the old Vermont farmer who would saw wood and say nothing, but he just wouldn't talk about it. They figured they had been gypped, but they weren't going to admit it. But that was an interesting case. I guess, partly, because it was one of my first ones.

PORTER: Nevis, excuse me, but before we go on--get into this tape any further--let's get down who you are. I don't think we've gotten that on this tape. "This is Nevis Cook who retired from the Food and Drug as Director of New Orleans, when, in 1972?"

COOK: I don't remember.

PORTER: Well, about that time anyway. And we are talking today. It is April 26, 1977, in New Orleans, Excuse me, I didn't want to interrupt you. You were talking about these cases, but I think the tape should show who you are.

COOK: But, at that time, for some reason, it was believed that the only way you could use photographs as evidence in

court was if you developed and printed them yourself, so everybody had to learn to develop and print pictures, if they were doing work which required pictures, and, of course, all this so-called filth work did in the food industry. I acquired a pretty good reputation as a photographer. I didn't use the camera that they furnished me. I went out and bought myself one and used it because I liked it better. Nowadays, of course, we send them out for printing, and we still use them as evidence in court.

PORTER: We were doing that out west, too. I guess everybody felt that it was necessary to develop your own pictures.

COOK: Yeah. We did the work. We did our practice on that mostly in the evenings. Most of us were single, and we were enjoying learning how to use photography, so we'd just come back--I mean come back after work and work on it. We used Government film and paper, but we did the work, mostly on our own time. We were peripherally involved in a lot of things. That oral diabetes treatment--we finally prosecuted those doctors for peddling that, and, of course, we were involved a little in Laetrile, which is now making a big come back, apparently.

PORTER: Yeah, it has been going on a long time, hasn't it?

COOK: It was going on for sometime before I got to Food and Drug, which was in 1939.

PORTER: Oh, yeah, it was more--

COOK: It's at least 50 years old.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: Things have a habit of--even if you ever get them squashed a little bit--they come back to that same place. There was one in New England when I got up there, many, many years later--selling--they weren't selling it under that name, but they were selling metal plates to wear on your shoes. One was copper and one was zinc. The copper one-- it gave you directions to wash it in a solution of some vinegar in it, and you know that copper in contact with your skin will tarnish, and when you wash it in an acid solution, you get a greenish color--and that proves that it is taking all that poison out of you.

I don't know if you wanted me to go into--at all--some of the people I knew well--

PORTER: You know, I think it would be interesting.

COOK: Ed Holmes managed to get himself into the job as Chief Inspector shortly after I went there. I don't know if you ever met Ed or not.

PORTER: No, I didn't.

COOK: He was a great practical joker and the biggest gossip

I have ever seen, male or female. He could tell you endless stories about other people in Food and Drug and their sexual activities, and J. J. McManus was the Director and lived in virtual isolation.

PORTER: Is that right. I've, of course, heard of him a lot.

COOK: But he never mingled with the troops. I don't think I ever went in and talked with him more than a couple of times in the time I was there.

PORTER: WAS that typical of management, then, you think?

COOK: That was typical, at least of some of them. The thing that struck me, too, was that, with the single exception of John Sanders, the laboratory people did not mingle socially with the Inspectors then. In fact, they didn't have much to do with each other. I never really understood that. I tried to prevent a situation of that kind from developing in later years when I was a Director myself, and with some success, at least I hope so. But, anyway, we all knew that there were so many of these new people in there. One small room. It wasn't twice as big as this one, I don't believe, for all these new inspectors. They had to get us out of there. We all knew it was coming. None of us wanted to leave. We were all Southerners. The day finally rolled around when it became my turn. They sent me to Philadelphia.

I had never been north of the Mason-Dixon Line in my life, and I left with some trepidation. I didn't know anybody at Philly except one person that I had met at that so-called training conference in New York. Apparently they had some training money to spend so they sent a whole bunch of these new people to New York for a week. Pretty much a farce, to tell you the truth.

PORTER: There isn't much you can learn in a week really.

COOK: No, and we didn't have much in the way of teachers, to tell you the truth either. What the Hell, we go around in big mobs and we go through a plant. The two or three guys next to the leader of the group could hear what he said. With the noise of the machinery, everybody else was trailing along and looking around. We even went to the Fulton Fish Market one day, and the guy that was leading the group got so far ahead that I never heard anything he said, and when we got back we were all supposed to write up something on each trip. I asked Bill Swain what he was going to write about this one. "Today we went to the Fulton Fish Market. We saw some big fish and some little fish. No medium size fish were observed." Swain was a pretty out-spoken guy in those days.

Anyway, they sent me to Philadelphia, and I didn't know anybody there except one man, who is no longer with Food and Drug. He quit and went to work for Campbell Soup. I

guess maybe they did it with all newcomers to give them the dirty work. They put all of us to sampling butter in the freezers, and in Philadelphia they don't bring it out for you to sample. They put you in the freezer, and you get the sample and hope the buzzer will work so that they will come and let you out because the door is locked and you cannot open it from inside--at least, I didn't know how.

PORTER: That was the duty I got in San Francisco. What you do there is make your rounds, and they would set out the butter you were going to sample, and I went back there the next day.

COOK: In other places, I've been told that they would bring the stuff out and let you sample it. They didn't there, and the butter was very expensive. You know they had to have a 80% minimum butterfat, and an awful lot of people were cheated. I ran into some that had so much water in it that even heating a jar with an alcohol lamp, you couldn't stick it in the stupid stuff. I finally took a hatchet and chopped off some pieces of it and brought it in, and it was--God, it was about 60% butterfat. It was the lowest I had ever seen. But that is the only time that I decided, "Hell, if they are going to have me sample butter all the time, I think I would rather have another job." Not knowing any better, I sat down and wrote to the head of the Division of Pharmacology in Washington, and told him that I had had a little bit of Pharmacology in Graduate School, it was very

interesting to me, and if he had an opening for a neophyte trainee, I would like to come down." Of course, that is not the way to do it. I didn't know it, and shortly after that the Chief Inspector had me in for a little conference, and I told him, "Hell, I'm tired of sampling butter." He put me out mostly on so-called filth work. The gross filth in the food industry--and I developed quite a reputation for my photography and for the clarity of my descriptive narrative that went with it. In fact, sometimes somebody else would go out and do an inspection and wouldn't get good pictures and couldn't write up a good story, and they would send me out to do it over.

PORTER: You know, when I came in--in 1942--it seems to me that when you went out to make a filth inspection, in a sense you went out to build a case. You knew it was going to be filthy before you ever went out there.

COOK: Yep, and I had some small part in putting the first man in jail for running a filthy candy plant. I think it was the first one who ever went to jail.

PORTER: Is that right?

COOK: Yep, and he had the filthiest plant that I have ever seen. Honestly, if you stood on the floor in one place for awhile, you would have a hard time moving your feet. There was about half an inch of coating of candy on the floor. It was on the light switches--just gobs of it--and the guy

who was making big rolls of candy that was supposed to be broken up and made into bars upstairs--he sent it up on the elevator. He was also stoking the furnace--a coal furnace, and he would come in from stoking the furnace and then slap this big ball of candy with his hands. You could see his hand prints all over in black. I chopped out a couple of them and brought them back for exhibits. I've never seen the equal of that place. Mice were running all over. Mice excreta in everything you came to. I had been criticized on a previous inspection for not being precise in telling, "How many did you see?" I brought back a candy tray--one that was not in use--to the office--the wooden trays they put it on, you know, and sat down and counted them and there were 188 mouse turds on that tray. I thought that ought to be precise enough for them. I found another candy plant that had the most flies I have ever seen. They were not ordinary houseflies. These were those big blue-green--

PORTER: Bottle--they call them bottle flies.

COOK: Blue-bottle flies, and there were millions of them. They were everywhere. They were getting into everything. They were getting into the fondant, and they were getting into this and that, and I took a picture of a corner of one of those marble slabs they rolled the fudge on to cool. I've forgotten how many--I think there were about 80 flies you could count in this little area, and I took a picture of it, and they would come in with those cutters and cut it into squares, and somebody--the fly was a little unwary--

and they had cut him in two and then came back the other way and cut him the second time.

PORTER: He was drawn and quartered.

COOK: That one didn't get prosecuted. They sent me back for reinspection. I scared the daylight out of the guy with all of my pictures. He had installed screens in the place. He had installed big fans where materials were brought in--so that when the doors were open and the fans started blowing, they would keep the flies from coming in. It was hard to find a fly in the whole place. They didn't prosecute. He was one of the worse.

Let's see now. I did some cheese work, you know, the sediment and the milk they made cheese out of.

PORTER: I spent years doing that.

COOK: Sediment testers, and most of the sediment was cow manure. We did a bunch of that. That was pretty rough work because you had to get up extremely early in the morning to get out there when the milk was being delivered to them and do the sediment testing.

PORTER: Did you use the short one, or did you use that long one?

COOK: Well, I don't really remember that there were two sizes. I just used one that would reach all the way to the bottom of those big cans.

PORTER: Well, when I came into the Western District, we were first using what they called the Wisconsin Tester, which took the same amount of milk, but it was like a short little bucket that you dipped the milk out. You stirred the milk, dipped it, and then you pulled the frame work out.

COOK: Well, we took it off the bottom.

PORTER: Yeah, well that was the kind we switched to.

COOK: And we got quite a few seizures on the basis of our cheese work up there, and while I was on one of those cheese trips I got notice of induction into the armed forces. I happened to be right in that middle group. The first ones that went in from Inspection Branch got immediate commissions. The second group--they had all they needed of that particular skill of officers, so we just went in as enlisted men--Buck Privates, and then they quit taking anybody because they got the staff so low, and I was in that middle group, and I spent almost 3 1/2 years in service, but that is a totally different story which I propose to write someday because I think it's interesting.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: I'm sure it's quite different now from all I hear. Well, when I came back they sent me to Harrisburg as a Resident Inspector. They were just beginning to put in Resident Posts, and I opened that one, and it was a fertile

field because we were far enough away from Philly--people didn't get over there very often--and a lot of these people had never seen a Federal Food and Drug Inspector. Some of them were in bad shape. I think the worse ones were some of the small flour mills who produced flour primarily for sale within the State to make pretzels.

PORTER: Oh.

COOK: So, the only way we could get at them was to get the people making the pretzels, because they shipped out of state. I'll never forget one of those flour mills. I went down underneath the mill, and the whole place--there were rat holes all over--and the rats were not even afraid of you. They came marching out of one of those holes, and I was a little bit afraid of those rats.

PORTER: I guess so.

COOK: But, of course, they were crapping in everything--all over the place. While I was in Harrisburg, they held a Drug Inspectors' Conference in Washington, and in those days drug inspection was not really such a big deal as it is now. They didn't pay much attention to prescription drugs, as you know.

PORTER: Yes.

COOK: We had one man, Luther Johnke.

PORTER: Yeah, I knew him.

COOK: He had pretty much a monopoly on the drug inspection work, and he was selected to go to the conference. I asked the then Chief Inspector, who later became the Director, if he couldn't swing a deal to let me go. He did. I went to Washington to that conference, and I had three papers to present, and I had very carefully prepared those things, and I didn't read them either. I had them in front of me in case I needed to refresh my memory on starting a paragraph or something, but I presented them, and that conference was attended by the top hierarchy down there in Washington--the Commissioner, the Deputy, the head of General Counsel--

PORTER: Dunbar? Was Dunbar Commissioner at that time?

COOK: Yep, I believe he was. I don't know whether he was in there--yes, I guess it was Dunbar.

PORTER: Sounds like him.

COOK: It was either him or Larrick. Yes, it was Dunbar because, hell, Dunbar was still around when I was transferred to Washington. But, anyhow, I apparently impressed a few people with my presentations. I chaired the meeting one day. I'm afraid I missed a few speeches the day before because they told me--Winton Rankin was down there then--and he told me, "You are going to be chairing tomorrow's session", and I spent the rest of the day trying to make sure I knew people by name so that I could call them by name when they wanted

to say something, and I don't think I missed many. So I made an impression, and shortly thereafter I was offered a job in Washington. In those days, everybody was Assistant to the Commissioner. Actually, I worked directly for George Larrick. That was before he became Commissioner or even Deputy, and I developed a great deal of respect for that man. Nobody will ever make me believe that he took any special favors from industry or, knowingly did anything really wrong.

PORTER: I'd agree with that from what I know.

COOK: Oh, I worked directly for him a long time and there were a lot of amusing things happend, and a lot of interesting things. One of the big deals at the time, that we never managed to do anything about at the time, was the Western Research Laboratories and their reducing regimen of digitalis and laxatives and few other odds and ends. A fair number of patients--of the people taking that stuff--died, but it was the opinion of our Bureau of Medicine that we couldn't prove that it killed them, and it was not until many years later that they decided to tackle it. They claimed that it was improved methodology, and they could show that the digitalis did them in, along with the thyroid--they were taking thyroid, digitalis, laxatives, and a few other things.

PORTER: Yeah, I remember. I was in Denver at that time and made an inspection out there--at least once.

COOK: Yeah. I wrote the nastiest letter of the kind that I ever wrote in my life and was scared to sign it. I got some initials on it from various people and sent it in, and I had C. W. Crawford sign it out. It was--I've got a copy of it here. Brought it along just in case you would be interested in seeing it.

PORTER: I would.

COOK: But that was one of them, and there was a finger nail base coat. You remember that one?

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: I was in that one up to my ears. Revlon--I'm not certain--one of the big cosmetic firms, and it was a funny thing that a substantial number of people who used it regularly, their nails thickened and turned black, and some of them fell off, and we didn't know what was in the thing that made it do it. It apparently was an allergic reaction, maybe, but it affected an awful lot of people, so we set out to take it off the market, and I got hundreds of letters to answer. I was telling them the truth--I told them what was in it, and what we had found through investigations, and so one day somebody told me, "How do you get away with telling them that much", and he showed me that regulation about what you can divulge. Somewhere--

PORTER: Yeah, on trade secrets.

COOK: Well, it went further than that. The old one did. I took a look at that regulation and I trotted down to see George Larrick, and I said, "Look, I don't know who wrote this thing, but if you took that literally, you couldn't tell anybody the time of day if you got it off the office clock". Well, he said, "It's like the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. It must be given a liberal interpretation." He read my letters and said, "That's fine--continue to send them out like that." But, the firm did take it off the market, and I'm sure that they had too many consumer complaints themselves. We got bitter letters from a lot of consumers, stating, "Good stuff. We love it."

Then, we got into that big fight to revise the law to include definition of prescription drugs. For definitions--there were three of them--and to prevent refills unless authorized by the doctor. Paul Dunbar made a speech at Atlantic City, before the National Association of Retail Druggists, and he told them that a prescription is just like a check written on the bank. You can cash it once, and that's all, unless the doctor authorizes refilling, and that was a bombshell. I've never seen such furor in my life, and because I was a pharmacist, I guess, and because I had acquired some reputation of being able to make a decent speech, I got to be sort of Ambassador without portfolio to the pharmacy profession.

PORTER: Oh, is that right?

COOK: And I got sent all over the map to make speeches to pharmacy meetings, and I'm telling you I had hostile audiences sometimes. I remember one of them that I was sorely tempted to say things I shouldn't say, but I kept my mouth shut. The other guy that was speaking--it was a sort of debate between us is what it wound up to be--he was saying things that I knew damned well were not the truth, but I couldn't accuse him of being a liar, but I was sorely tempted.

PORTER: What were we doing--were we doing anything--we took the position that no retail sales, but were we doing anything about it, or--

COOK: Well, not until after Dunbar's speech, as far as I know, and then we very carefully selected some cases where there was terrible abuse. I mean, they didn't just give one single refill, they doubled a refill, and refilled it so frequently they couldn't possibly be using it in accordance with the directions, and we showed injuries--I think primarily from barbiturates--short acting ones, and we won our first cases, which established the thing pretty well, and only then did we get any support out of the pharmacy profession for a law that would really spell it out--what they could do and what they couldn't do. Incidentally, I was in on the first of the OTC work in Atlanta. I never did too much of it after that, but I was in on the first one.

PORTER: The Sullivan case, wasn't it. Or, was it?

COOK: Well, I believe the Sullivan case was the first one we won--that man happened to be a friend of my brother.

PORTER: Is that right?

COOK: Yeah, but initially, in that OTC work, we went out and made buys without a prescription of any sort, and then we would cite them to a hearing and let them go. We didn't prosecute, originally.

PORTER: Didn't we--

COOK: Sort of give them a first warning.

PORTER: Yeah, didn't we give them a P. L. 5 letter?

COOK: Yes, write them a letter. Cite them to a hearing-- at least put them on notice. We never prosecuted anybody, I don't think, that hadn't had the first bite off the apple. I never did like OTC work. I got out of as much of it as I could after that initial round. I don't know--I got out of it in Harrisburg because all of the pharmacists knew me, which wasn't true, but it was the best excuse I could think of.

WELL, let's see. That's a little bit of the Washington years. Well, then, I--the only job I ever asked for in my life with Food and Drug--I'd been in Washington for 11 years, and I decided if I didn't get out of there I was going to grow roots, and I decided that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life there, so I went in to see the Deputy Commis-

sioner, John L. Harvey, and told him that if he thought I could handle it I would like a crack at a District Director's job. He said, "Well, I usually let Allan Rayfield have a considerable voice in such matters. Why don't you go talk to him?" So, I went to see Allan and told him what I had done, and the Judge said I should talk to him, and he got up and he paced around his desk several times, and he says, "Now, don't get offended or take me wrong, but just what in the Hell makes you think you could be a District Director?" I said, "Allan I don't know how to answer that except with another question." I said, "I've held down several jobs, some of them, I think, rather responsible, and I haven't fallen on my face yet. At least, nobody has told me I have, and just what in the Hell makes you think I can't?"

PORTER: That was the only way to talk to him.

COOK: You know, it was down there at that time--the people who were handling those recommendations for prosecutions, seizures, and answering letters from industry--they had a Hell of a lot of autonomy, and you could just decide yourself--you didn't have to consult with somebody about this--you knew how to go ahead and handle it. Things have changed, I think they've gotten even more changed by now, but things changed. I bitterly protested when they came out with the announcement that everything having to do with drugs had to be cleared through the Bureau of Medicine, you got a drug

here and the analysis shows that it is half the grain strength, and I don't see what we could have to go and send that over to the Bureau of Medicine, which was in another building, and waste a week. The facts are there. But the Bureau of Medicine, at that time, had the philosophy that if it was not therapeutically significant--whatever that means--it didn't make any difference how bad the damned thing was, composition wise, they wouldn't do anything about it. Well, that changed, of course.

Anyway, I got sent to Boston. I had barely got there when the big Aminotriazine thing broke. I had not even learned what a District Director was supposed to do before I had swarms of newspaper reporters, some of them with recording equipment, picture taking, and, yes, I guess, we had TV by then, TV cameras. Hell, we didn't even have decent methodology. The lab was breaking their necks trying to get a method worked out, and I've never forgotten-- I told one reporter as he went out the door, "Now, don't go back and say that I said that there was or was not aminotriazole in the cranberries in New England. As soon as we get our methodology squared away, we'll set it up on an assembly line basis, and we will be running samples practically day and night, but we don't know." That night's edition of that rag up there, it was that tabloid, had a full length picture of me, and the headline says, "Federal Official Says New England Cranberries Free of Taint". I've never trusted

that newspaper from that day forward, and I jumped all over that reporter the next time I saw him, and he swore, "I wrote it the way you told me, but the Editor changed it", which is possible.

PORTER: Yeah, that's--

COOK: That was a nine day's wonder--that Aminotriazole deal. I still, in my personal opinion, think that the method was so lousy that a lot of stuff that was seized may or may not have had Aminotriazole in it, and a lot of it that was passed may or may not have had Aminotriazole in it. It was that bad. Finally, we made one seizure, and when the Lab people came in--Frank McNull, George Schwartzmon, and the chemist who did the work was a brilliant chemist. He went back to teaching at MIT, I think. They said "We finally found Aminotriazole in some cranberries", and I said, "I don't believe it." They said, "Yep, it's there." So we made one small seizure and they were seizing it all over this country, but I think we had as good chemists as anybody else did.

PORTER: In Chicago, we were--

COOK: I never did think that there was anything to be scared about, but it was one of the first really big scares about a food product, I guess. And, of course, we had that product called "Honeygar", a mixture of honey and vinegar. There was a M. D. up in Vermont wrote a book, "Vermont Folk Medicine", and he talked about--

PORTER: What was his name?

COOK: The vinegar man? D. C. Jarvis. So we seized his books, along with the "Honeygar", a few places, and Earnie Bemis got the assignment to go up there and make a speech to a bunch of people in Vermont. I suggested, "Why don't you put in--I made him up some jokes about Honeygar.. He used them in the speech. After he got through, old Doc Jarvis came up and introduced himself. It wouldn't have embarrassed me much, but I think it did embarrass Earnie Bemis. He wasn't used to that sort of thing.

And we had the biggest mail order, health food firm in the world up there, and they know that health foods are supposed to be produced without any commercial fertilizers and no pesticide sprays, and all that stuff, and I finally wasted some time of my inspectors and those in some other Districts on the West Coast somewhere, just tracking down some raisins they were selling that were natural, organic. We found out they were just the commercial raisins. They had the same fertilizer, the same pesticides, everything everybody was using.

PORTER: They just turned into organically grown when they got into the store.

COOK: But Washington wouldn't do one earthly thing about it. In fact, we ran into one warehouse up there, where they had a man in there taking the commercial labels off and putting "natural, organic" labels on, but Washington would not touch that sort of a case. I don't know, maybe they still

won't. I still think it is a fraud.

Then we had some other interesting news--cocoa beans. At that time the major chocolate producers were buying cocoa beans and just putting them in warehouse storage, as a hedge against somebody raising the price on them. When a new load came in, they would take it off the boat and take it to the plant and leave those in storage. Earnie Bemis made an inspection of the warehouse up there. Here's this huge mound of cocoa beans that is absolutely--the top of it is covered with webbing, and you can see the moths flying around, you can see the fairly good-sized larvae crawling all over. Those pictures, incidentally, were taken by Earnie Bemis, who is retiring July 1, and they are still being used in training sessions for inspectors.

PORTER: Well, I'll be darned.

COOK: They were really good ones. We got involved with a firm up there that was making breaded fish sticks, and the dry breading mix flowed down a chute to be mixed into the batter, and there were so many cockroaches in it that you could see the big cockroaches, digging like mad, trying to go back up the chute in the pictures the Inspector got, and the little ones, they couldn't make it back up there, and they were going into the breading mix, and we actually found them in the breading on those fish sticks. In addition to that, they were labeled as haddock, and they were really codfish, and that is a major crime up in New England.

Haddock is the only fish that's really good up there, and, you know, I had an awful time getting that case filed. The company--the people who ran the company--were close friends of John F. Kennedy, who was President at the time, and the United States Attorney aspired to be a judge, and he didn't want to offend any friend of Kennedy. I finally had to take all of those pictures over there--and I had a hard time even getting an appointment with him--and show them to him. He said, "Well, I guess it's a little more serious than I thought," so he filed the case, and he told our Assistant United States Attorney to recommend a nominal fine if they would plead nolo, and he recommended a nominal fine and the old Judge Byzansky, who was a pretty tough old bird, said, "Why are you recommending such a small fine?" He had looked at the pictures too, and he stammered and stuttered and said, "That is the recommendation of the United States Attorney's office." The Judge knew the situation. He smiled and fined-- I think it was a partnership and the individuals--about ten times what the Assistant United States Attorney had recommended, and put them on probation, and the United States Attorney got so mad that he took this guy off of handling Food and Drug cases and put a guy on who was absolutely no good. Oh, that's the politics of some people.

We found people feeding chicken manure at a time when medicated feeds were extensively used in chicken feed. They were feeding it to beef cattle. That didn't seem

quite Kosher to me. I knew that chicken manure must have lots of drug residues in it, if nothing else, and I sent an Inspector up there and he came back and said that the guy had found out he could put about one-third chicken manure in the feed and that the cattle would eat it, but if he put more than that, they wouldn't eat as much feed. They wouldn't get fattened up so fast, and I found out that they were selling a lot of it to the Quartermaster Corps of the Army. I called up the people up there and I said, "Do you buy beef that has been raised on chicken manure?" He said, "We don't know what it has been raised on." I said, "How about a harvest of pig?" But you know, they never did do anything about it.

PORTER: Did they quit buying from him?

COOK: No, they didn't quit buying from him--they kept right on buying it, and then, of course--I'd better get this thing--don't want to go too far with it. We had a lot of work on decomposition in fish. The stuff was caught--at that time we thought if it was beyond certain number of miles limit, and they brought it in, it is in interstate commerce when it gets here, and if the boat stays out too long, or they don't use enough ice, it would come in and it was already stinking, so we would seize it right there before it ever got shipped in interstate commerce--away from there--but we stated that it is in interstate commerce now, and we

had to resort to various means of proving the stuff was caught outside--I think it was the 12 mile limit--by getting expert testimony that that kind of fish you can't catch inside those limits. But, what started happening was that people--we would find a batch of fish in a warehouse, frozen, and it would be too ripe to let them sell, and they would thaw the fish out, after we had told them to hold that stuff because we were going to seize it--you know how long that machinery takes--

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: They would take it out and thaw it out and go through it again and sort out the bad fillets, and throw them away and put it back in the warehouse, and when we got around to making seizure, they would insist, "We cleaned that stuff up." I put up with that for awhile, and I finally said, "Let the seizure go through." I didn't even tell Washington what he had done, but we seized it anyhow, and it probably was not decomposed then, but it sure was when we sampled it, and we didn't try to find out what shape it is in now. But all we were doing was acting as a Lab for them, and if we did happen to catch them, they would sort, if we didn't catch them, it got shipped. So I decided that I wouldn't put up with that any more. When I first went up there, I followed Ken Kirk, and Ken Kirk had the philosophy

instilled in all the Field people at that time that your efficiency is measured by the number of seizures and prosecutions you make. And the inspectors were taught to find something bad--insect infested or whatever--you tell the guy to hold it. Even if he says, "I'll go through it", tell them to hold it and we'll seize it--that's one more seizure on the record.

PORTER: Right.

COOK: I said, "This stuff has got to cease. It is a waste of Government money to go through all of that. Let them throw it away--we'll record the thing, and if they don't want to accept that as proof that we are getting something done, why, the hell with them, cause it's a waste of time and money, and, in addition to that, if the guy keeps that buggy flour in there, why it will spread to the next batch he puts in there, so we'll quit that. And that went over like a lead balloon with the Inspection Branch, but that was the new philosophy we adopted anyway.

And let's see, then, of course, we got James L. Goddard while I was up there. I should mention that we got our new building.

PORTER: Oh, yeah, you were there at that time.

COOK: Yeah, we were in the Old Customhouse, and you couldn't keep roaches out of it to save your life with all the stuff

we brought in downstairs and, as a matter of fact, it was so hard to keep them out that we were very leary of seizing anything because of allegations that we found roach fragments in it. You couldn't keep them out upstairs no matter how much you sprayed, and you had to be careful what you sprayed or you would get pesticides on it.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: So, it wasn't an easy deal. When the new building was dedicated, contrary to the advice of Washington, I sort of minimized the publicity on it because, God we couldn't handle the crowds if they really came in swarms, and we had plenty who came. And it's the first time in my life--you know how penurious Food and Drug used to be--how you never dared spend a nickle for something that wasn't something to do with law enforcement. I did some things that I'd never done before. I rented some chairs, and the only place where we could get them altogether was in the garage, and we had to take all the cars out and put the chairs in there, and we were supposed to have the Mayor on the platform. I had them build a platform, and a ramp so that he could come up--the Mayor was in a wheel chair, and then he didn't show up, and I had a little bit of decoration put in there. We tried to get the Marine Band to play but they turned us down, and I wrote the speech--the dedication of the new building for George Larrick--and Allan Rayfield called me and told me

to write the speech. I said, "Allan, I never have been to a building dedication. I don't know what you are supposed to say." "You write the speech", so I wrote one and sent it to Allan and he gave it to George Larrick, and Larrick showed up the night before the dedication ceremony. I said, "How'd you like the speech?" He said, "Did you write that?" Allan didn't even tell him I wrote that. "But that was good. I cut out a couple of things." I said, "I know--I knew you would. There were one or two things in there that I knew you wouldn't say." I said, "A lot of the Vermont Maple Sugar came from Canada, and I knew you weren't going to say that."

PORTER: Jim Beebe sent me some clippings on the building dedication up there in Boston.

COOK: Yep, and we had one Director who came over to the dedication because he was going to have one soon, and I'm telling you, he took my exhibits, he took everything back with him, and I had an awful time getting them all back, but he copied it down to the last note. I believe.

It wasn't too much longer after that--you know Larrick had said that when they dedicated the new building in D. C., he was going to quit, and he did. He announced his retirement the day that he dedicated it. And then we got James L. Goddard. He's the only Commissioner we ever had that I

couldn't talk to. I gave up trying. He came up there. He spent 5 minutes with me, and he was off to Harvard or some place.

I should mention one other thing that I left out. LSD, hallucinogenic drugs, you know they started at Harvard.

PORTER: Oh.

COOK: They--Tim Leary and I've forgotten the other fellow's name--Leary became the most famous. The other guy probably had sense enough to get out of it. But he was using those drugs on students--volunteers--and the thing that absolutely threw me--I talked to him but he was pretty far gone when I talked to him. He said he took the drugs too, at the same time the students did, because, otherwise, he couldn't judge their reactions. I wrote a letter to George Larrick and told him about it. I guess I wrote it to John Harvey, and I told him it reminded me of cocktail parties I had been to, where I couldn't really appreciate all the wit until I had had a couple of snorts myself.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: But, Leary, you know, he's still occasionally in the news, but he started the whole thing.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: And he set up a house out there in Newton, much to the alarm of the citizenry, because the people were coming and going at all hours of the night, and I had bitter letters from parents, saying their young folks were staying there. That was after he gave up and quit Harvard. He concentrated on his hallucinogenic drugs--mind-expanding--the poor man. But, anyhow, to get back to Goddard. You know he came in and completely changed the direction of the Food and Drug. He really pulled some beauts. You remember how he jumped on the prescription drug industry.

PORTER: I guess I don't remember.

COOK: Well, except that I had been campaigning for a long time that we were ignoring prescription drugs, particularly the claims they made for them, but he jumped on also their errors in composition and, at least in New York and I think in some other Districts, they hired technicians on a temporary basis to come in and run these things, and if they found something wrong with the drug, they would have an experienced drug man run the sample to see if he confirmed it. Then, when all the results went to Washington, Goddard made a big speech about what percentage of the prescription drugs were out-of-limits--whatever limits it was he said--5%--but, anyhow, what had happened was that they had turned all these Lab. results--worksheets and stuff, over to some clerks who didn't know what they were doing. In

many instances, to my certain knowledge, they listed those preliminary results by the technicians, which were not confirmed by the experienced analyst--they listed that--and he used it in his speeches, and when the drug industry finally woke up to the fact that something was screwy in the whole mess and started--

PORTER: The drug industry was asking for data?

COOK: They were asking for the data on which his speeches were based, and some of it mysteriously disappeared.

PORTER: I was in Washington at that time. I think I remember we did some retabulations, and I think I got involved in that in some way. I can't remember exactly how--trying to prove he was right.

COOK: There was no way you could prove him right because he wasn't, and I got a letter, telling me that on every drug that had been found out-of-limits, they wanted to know exactly what had been done about it. Well, I ignored the damned letter because there was practically nothing on re-analysis--check analysis--that was off enough to matter, and Harris Kenyon, who was then his right bower--not his speech writer--he had somebody else for that--Harris Kenyon told me, "You'd better do something about it", so I sat

down and pointed out that some of these things had initially been run in New York by technicians, and we couldn't confirm their results--and I listed every one of them. There was one drug that only a handful had ever been shipped before we found it to be bad, and, according to the old philosophy of the Bureau of Medicine, it was not therapeutically significant, so I didn't bother to chase it down--I think there was one little shipment to one of the other states in New England. So, I confessed error on that one and said we would go look for it--I didn't expect to find any at this late date. In fact, I didn't expect to find any when he finally got the results on the other one, but that was something--that deal. I was up there when Goddard first made his speech about the corner drug store going out of business, and he made it before a Federal Executive Board, which was not covered by reporters, and I knew he was treading on dangerous ground, and I considered talking to him about it, but he had already made it pretty clear he wasn't interested in my opinions about much. The next time he used that same thing there were reporters present and all hell broke loose, as you know.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: About the corner drug store going out of business. There were even cartoons. I remember one, a little old lady was talking to the pharmacist, and he said, "Lady,

you don't have to worry. He talked about the corner drug store. We're in the middle of the block." Also, the other thing he got into trouble about was, if I remember rightly, that one--I did not hear him make that initial speech-- he said he didn't think marijuana was any worse than booze.

PORTER: Yeah, I remember that too.

COOK: And the silly part of it was that we had no control, whatever, at that time over marijuana, so why talk about it.

PORTER: Not much over booze.

COOK: Practically none over booze, except we did find some up there, some sort of cocktail mix, that didn't sell. They had stored it in copper drums-tanks-and it had gotten enough copper in it to make people sick. I am the one who sent that famous wire to Goddard. You know, when he put in that teletype system all over the country. And he asked each Director to send a wire on the date they promised to have it all ready. I sent him one that said, "What hath Goddard Wrought?" I don't think he ever forgave me. I didn't know the man was totally devoid of a sense of humor, but he thought I was making fun of him, I reckon. I didn't intend it that way. That is the famous message that was first sent over the telegraph--was it--

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: From Baltimore to Washington, "What hath God wrought?"--  
"What hath Goddard wrought?" I didn't expect to get into  
trouble with it, but I sure did.

PORTER: You sometimes get into trouble over the things  
that really don't--

COOK: Well, I'll give him credit for two or three things,  
and one is the teletype system. We needed that but it has  
been sorely over used. Reams of stuff come over that. I  
told them, "Quit bringing that bale of junk to me. I don't  
want it. I'll brief my secretary on what I want to see, and  
she can sort it. I don't want to see all of that."

It was not an unmixed blessing but it sure did help.  
The other was one that I fought bled and died, when I was  
in Washington, to keep off the market, cobalt and iron  
preparations. What happened was that a firm brought out one  
of these iron treatments for iron deficiency anemia, and he  
put some cobalt in it, and, unfortunatly, the first person  
who reviewed it--I could name him but I wouldn't advise  
putting it in--he may not even be alive by now-- was  
Ralph Kneeland, and he didn't notice that there was much  
more cobalt than was ordinarily found in these vitamin-  
mineral preparations, so he O.K'd it, and I just happened to  
run accross that thing one day, and I looked at that  
formula, and I called the then head of the Division of  
Pharmacology, and I gave him the directions for use and how

much cobalt was in it, and he said, "Ah, ha, that you can't sell," and so I went in to talk to John Harvey, and he signed out a letter to the firm, telling them that we had concluded that this was a new drug, and they had to prove safety. Here they came boiling into Washington, screaming and yelling, and so they put the matter into abeyance, and I wrote the letters that went out myself, to hematologists--the top hematologists in the country--and asked them for their opinion, and I didn't find anybody that thought it should be sold without prescription. I found some who said it shouldn't be given to anybody who wasn't in the hospital, and one or two of them said he had serious doubts that it should be given at all. I still couldn't win the fight, and finally the then head of the Bureau of Medicine came up with figures that he just plucked out of the air, saying with this level of cobalt you can sell it without a prescription under such and such a label. High levels can be sold as a precription drug, and I protested that one, and finally I was so vocaferous about it-- I did everything but get fired over that thing--and they called a big meeting--I thought it was an honest to God meeting to decide what to do about this thing--and the head of the Division of Pharmacology, the Bureau of Medicine, and all kinds of worthies were there, including the Commissioner and the Dupty Commissioner, and I found out the meeting was to shut up Cook. Really, they had made the decision, and when we went down the hall I jumped on the head of the Division of Pharmacology and said, "Look, you didn't say the

same things in that meeting that you did to me." He said, "My conscience is clear", and I said, "Mine is, but I would like to ask you one thing, would you give that stuff to a kid of yours?" It was primarily for pediatric use.

PORTER: Oh.

COOK: And he just walked off. He didn't say a word. He knew damned well that he couldn't. But that stuff stayed on the market, and that is one thing Goddard took off the market, so I'll give him credit for that one.

Let's see, I believe he took--oh yeah--he took one other thing off the market that I had--oh yeah, I remember what that was. I mentioned it earlier. Finally he got around to getting rid of the digitalis, thyroid, laxatives and stuff that was being sold so widely for taking off weight, and I'll give him credit for those. Anyhow, Goddard concluded that he wanted to get rid of all the old timers that were out as District Directors, and a lot of them--the Directors--were scared to death--and, of course, Winton Rankin was sent out as his hatchet man, and Winton came up to my place and he combed it from top to bottom, looked at everything, came in and talked to me before he left, and I said, "Winton, as soon as you leave here I'm going to be getting calls from Directors all over this country, wanting to know why you were here." I said, "You know, as well as I do, they're all scared, and I'll tell you one man that ain't scared. If you think you've

got a boy who can run this place better than I'm running it, send him up here." Well, I guess as long as you feel that way about it, you're all right. Then, shortly after that, I tried to get a Deputy Director. I never had had one--never really had one in my life--and I talked to Harris Kenyon, and he said, "Oh, I thought you knew, you're going to Denver as Regional Assistant Commissioner." I said, "You're the first one that's given me the news." He said, "Well, you're coming down to the Directors' meeting next week, and you can talk to Dr. Goddard about it." But, as soon as I saw him and got him loose from the others, he said, "How about Denver?" I said, "Well, Commissioner, with all my family and my wife's family, who live on the East Coast, I might mention a preference." He said, "Oh, well, you'll love Denver." I saw he was determined to send me there, so I said, "Commissioner, I'll take Denver. I really want to see that part of the country."

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: But, those RAC jobs were simply made up jobs to move somebody into that you couldn't reasonably fire, in order to put in the man he wanted to as Director. There were only a couple of people he was afraid to tackle, and I guess you know who they were.

PORTER: I--

COOK: Gordon Wood, and McKay McKinnon.

PORTER: I was going to say McKinnon was one of them. Gordon Wood was one of them too?

COOK: Gordon Wood was one too. He didn't want to tackle either one of them. They had pretty good political ties. I never played politics in my life. I avoided politicians. I sent inquiries from politicians to Washington and let them answer them.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: Whenever at all possible. Anyhow, I spent almost a year and a half out there, feeling a little guilty every time I accepted a pay check. I have written here, and I brought it along, something I wrote at the request of the Regional Director of HEW, talking about what I was doing there, so you might want to read it.

PORTER: Yeah, I'd like to read it. I hope I can get some copies of some of your letters--you're famous for the letters you've written.

COOK: Some of them are a little bit satirical, but I have some of those. Most of them I only have single copies, so I'd want to get

It was interesting in some ways. I got a lot of speech making to do and conferences to attend, and I attended so many I got fed up going to meetings of any sort, and I haven't been

to many since I got out either. But, anyhow, after Goddard left, Winton Rankin called me up one day. I had written him a letter and told him, "As long as you want to keep me in Denver, I'll stay here. The natives are friendly and the climate is very good, but there surely must be some place that I could better serve the organization." He wrote back and said, "We have higher regard for what you're doing than you apparently do, but we will keep you in mind." Soon as Goddard left, he called me up and he said, "We have a directorship in New Orleans vacant. How about New Orleans?" I said, "When do you want me to report?" Well, he said, "You'll want to talk to your wife about it." I said, "Well, she's followed me all over the United States--I guess she'll follow me one more time." He said, well this was on a Friday, and he said, "Either I'll call you or Sam Fine will Monday and see if you've decided." Sam called me and said, "I hear you're willing to take New Orleans." I said, "Gladly, when do you want me to report?" He said, "As soon as you can get there. There's no Director there now." I said, "How about next Monday?" He said, "I was hoping you'd say that." So I came down and left my wife with the kids in high school and college out there. I couldn't very well bring the family down, but I came down and stayed by myself for awhile. I asked for and got thirty days per diem out of it. I said, "Make it a temporary assignment for thirty days, and then make it final", and they gave me that. I still lost a bunch of money on the deal. In fact, I lost money on every move I ever made, but that was characteristic.

I came in here and found a pretty good organization in most ways, and I enjoyed it for quite awhile, but there were a number of things. I was awfully fed up with some of the things we were being told to do, and I wrote a perfectly serious letter to Louis Weiss in Denver, telling him--I said, "We just can't do what's being asked of us--in no way with this small staff we've got. We're supposed to establish bridge positions, Upward Mobility, and everything else." We mostly have one person in a particular job. If we take him out of that, we've got nobody to do that job, and if we take him and train him for something else--we had a skeleton staff, and we just couldn't do it. I said, "People come down here from Washington and tell these people all the things that Management could do, if they only would, but they don't tell us how in the world we're going to do it. I've got a copy of that letter somewhere--over at the house. I just outlined some of the things that Managers--

PORTER: The smaller the office, the more difficult it is.

COOK: Oh, yes, and you got--it stirred up a lot of friction between males and females, and blacks and whites, because, primarily, of all the stuff they were coming out and telling them that we could do if we wanted to. There was no way we could tell him. I did manage to get some people promoted that I never, otherwise, could have done because of that, because we had a couple of women that deserved promotions and

I couldn't get it done anyway in the world. I had to make Jean Gaull a supervisor to get her promoted. I tried everyway to get her a 13 without making her a supervisor, because that really wasn't where she belonged, but finally it was the only way I could do it, so I did it that way. Anyway, between the frustrations of being directed to do things I couldn't do, I couldn't keep my blood pressure under control, even with a full regimen of pills, my arthritis was getting worse all the time, and finally I just decided that I think we can live on what I'll make on retirement, and I'm going to quit, so I threw in the sponge.

PORTER: Have you ever been sorry?

COOK: No, not one instant have I ever been sorry.

PORTER: Do you think it was your years in Washington that probably had the most impact on FDA? You have a pretty--you were making pretty high decisions, it seems to me, as I recall during all those years, because I was in the Field and I saw letters you signed that were vital decisions on an awful lot of things.

COOK: Yeah, I was even guilty of sending one seizure out that I could not get anybody in the place to agree with me. It was this Lead and Sulphur Hair Dye--it's still being sold--but they were saying, "It is not a dye. It will restore your hair to its original color", and all kinds of claims like

that, and nobody would go along with me, but, damn it, I approved seizure and sent it out myself.

PORTER: You know, Nevis,

COOK: We had a lot of latitude in those days.

PORTER: Well, there weren't very many of you making the decisions, and now that we have whole organizational units there--

COOK: Essentially we had me and Morris Yakowitz doing the drug work, and Ed Reed was doing most of the food work-- you know he went haywire--I don't know if you knew it.

PORTER: I didn't ever know him.

COOK: And then they got to where anything to do with foods had to be cleared with the Bureau of Foods, and anything about drugs had to be sent down to the Bureau of Drugs, and the clearance procedure got bogged down down there. It was going that way before I left, but it got worse after I left.

PORTER: Don't you think it's just getting more and more complicated. Each Bureau has a whole office of compliance--?

COOK: In addition to that, there was a certain esprit de corps and loyalty to the agency. People didn't used to go trotting up to the Capitol to see a Congressman or Senator when their views were rejected in favor of somebody else's, or maybe they were the only one who thought they should do so and so.

PORTER: But don't you think that's kind of a reflection of the times. It wasn't only with FDA--in things like that--

COOK: Yeah, maybe it's inevitable when you get bigger. We started out--I don't believe we had 300 people for the whole Food and Drug Administration. Incidentally, it sort of amused me. Included in my dedication ceremony speech for Larrick, I could not find anywhere, from anybody, anything about the beginnings of Food and Drug in Boston. Well, I just made one up out of whole cloth. I said they started upstairs over an old carriage house on Broad Street, with a couple of chemists, and embroidered that a little bit, and you know, it's now history. I've seen it reproduced in a number of places.

PORTER: I bet.

COOK: If there wasn't any history, I'd make some. I have no regrets at all. I do think now that the responsibility is being spread around so damned much, and the Commissioners are having to spend so much of their time, and the top staff in Washington--so much time defending a decision before Congressional Committees--that you can't even figure out who is running FDA any more, whether it's Ralph Nader, or Congress, or who it is, and that bothers me. It bothered me before I

quit, and it still bothers me, because I think if you put the right people in there, knowledgeable people, and give them a chance, they can do more. Some of those Commissioners make some totally ridiculous promises that we couldn't keep. Some product that got on the market and we had recalled it, and we had used all the usual means--we can't go in everybody's house and look for it--but, anyhow, the stupid thing killed somebody. It was sodium nitrite that got put in--in place of a meat tenderizer.

PORTER: Oh, yes, that's the one which ended up on the shelf with a little--was it a restaurant or was in a home--

COOK: Well, the way I was told it was a restaurant. I wasn't in Washington at the time. The Commissioner got up there before a Congressional Committee and said that from now on, when a dangerous product gets on the market, we will find every last package of it, which is ridiculous. You can't do it. Shortly after that we got that stupid vichyssoise soup.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: And that was marketed under I don't know how many brand names, but many, by firms all over this country, and, initially, the information was that there wasn't any in this area, but after a few days I told an Inspector to go out and look for it. Start with the gourmet shops. Hell, before we got through we were finding it in roadside stands. It was everywhere.

PORTER: That's right.

COOK: In fact, I told them, "I'm going to look under that big rock in my back yard. We've found a can everyplace else."

PORTER: Well, in the past year we found a few cans in a grocery store in Cheyenne, Wyoming, that somehow had never been picked up, and the guy who owned the store said he had never heard of the whole mess, which seems impossible-- the publicity was so great.

COOK: Yeah, but you just can't do it. What we wound up doing was becoming the Federal Recall Administration. We're spending more time on that than anything else. Between that and occasional disasters, like Hurricane Camille. I could write a whole book on that one. The one that devastated the Gulf Coast--that was Camille, wasn't it?

PORTER: Yeah, I think so.

COOK: There were some interesting stories that came out of that one too. There was a lot of fish meal that got wet and it was stinking, so health authorities over there had them bury it. Then, honest to God, somebody came along. He had bought it from the guy that had originally owned it, apparently, and he wanted permission to dig it up. But the health authorities over there--I think it's Harrison County-- and we had a whole bunch of people over there--and they really

worked with them. They did what our Inspectors suggested if they didn't have their own opinion. They went in one little retail store over there, and they were taking so much out to throw away that the proprietor finally said, "Why don't you just take it all?" We wouldn't have done it, but the State man said, "O. K., we will." They just took it all--they took everything in the store.

The only contest we had was over a liquor store that was innundated, and we made them dump that stuff. But there are endless episodes that have taken place, but I think I had something to do with shaking up a few of them. Actually, I saw in the Committee Report on a bill \_\_\_\_\_ It was the first time I ever knew that that stuff had gotten to the people who were writing the Committee Reports. There, also, I saw long after I left Washington, some of the newcomers using verbatim language in speeches that I had made before I left Washington. Some of these newcomers, you know, aren't-- Chet Hubble called them--

PORTER: What did he call them?

COOK: Androids! I would like some of these things back, but I can get you a few more if you want them. There's the one I told you about that I wrote of my experience in Denver.

PORTER: Oh, yeah, in Denver.

COOK: And here, this is the only copy I have of this, and this is the only copy I have of this. That is the nastiest letter I ever wrote to a firm, and I got a very nice letter in return, and I wondered what in the Hell was going on, and I found out they were being sued by the family of somebody who died. They didn't want any more problems at the moment.

PORTER: Yeah, I'd like to borrow these, but I wonder if-- I'll tell you what's going to happen, Nevis. You are going to be getting a letter, asking if you have any letters or written material which you think may have historical interest, and asking that you loan it to the New Orleans District for copying, and this letter is going out to all the retired people, and in the letter--what we are asking is that you send us in anything like that you think has historical interest, and indicate if you want it back, and, if so, we will copy it and send it back, and if you don't want it back, then, of course, we will just keep it and put it in the file. And the answer to that is, why don't you send some of this, and then some of it will get xeroxed and returned to you right here in town?

COOK: I could do that. This one I brought along just for the amusement, and as a contrast to that thing I wrote to the Regional Director out there. It is one of the best examples of

gobbledy gook I have ever seen in my life. I got it after I came down here. Louis Weiss sent it to me, and it is the kind of shit that those damned people in the Regional Offices wrote.

PORTER: Yeah.

COOK: I don't know whether you would be interested --

PORTER: I've read too much of it, I think. I haven't read that, but I've been reading that stuff for years too.

COOK: God! I wrote also while I was in Denver a one page thing on the "Muddle Cities Program". They made me a member of the "Muddle Cities Committee", and I had to go around and visit some of these places. I got out of as many as I could. "The Muddle Cities Program -- an elucidation for the uninformed -- a much misunderstood passage of creative Federalism." That was -- the damned thing -- I knew I'd better not sign it, but I gave a copy to the Public Information Officer, old Rick Wink. He was a maverick, too, and Rick reproduced it and sent it to every Public Information Officer in the country, but I knew that the Regional Director would die if he saw the damned thing, or shoot me, one. I wound it up with some comment to the effect that if they could just get some of these people to master the art of obfuscation, they could write applications for Federal grants, and that's better than working for a living.

PORTER: Well, thanks a lot, Nevis. We'll see how this all looks like when it gets printed.

COOK: Well, all I did was to write down a few little scribbles here to remind me to mention some things.

PORTER: Yeah, well that was great. I think now it's got to be -

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COOK: I think it is rather disjointed.

PORTER: Well, that's all right. I think its gotten to be martini time now.

COOK: Yeah, I feel sorta like it might be the sun over the yardarm.

PORTER: Right.