



EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH DORIS and EDMUND REGGIE

December 16, 2008
Lafayette, Louisiana

Interviewer
James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is an interview with Judge and Mrs. Reggie. It is December 16, in Lafayette, Louisiana. This is the second interview for both of them, and we've chatted a little bit, before the interview, about filling out the memories and the picture and the observations about Edward Kennedy. My first question is, when and how did you come to feel that you really knew him?

Doris Reggie: My reflections and remembrances will all be social, because of the social activities that we had with him and how I knew him as a friend. Early on, after we knew his brothers, he would come to Louisiana on occasion, once to represent his brother Bobby [Kennedy] and once when we gave a luncheon honoring him. He was marvelous. Several times he'd visit us at our Crowley home, and he was a wonderful, charming houseguest. These were all friendly. He was always lots of fun and very thoughtful.

When we moved to Nantucket and we bought our home in 1982, one of the very first visitors we had was Teddy. He sailed over to see us at our new Nantucket home. Now we're in Massachusetts. He was so thrilled, and brought as a housewarming gift, if you will, a pot of lobster stew, which I thought was so charming and so Old World, that he would bring a gift into our home. We had a lot of fun.

He visited with us on many, many occasions. He'd spend the night and we'd go sailing or go on the beach, and he was the one who first taught me about the environment on Nantucket being very precious. I remember we were walking on the beach and I saw a wildflower, and I leaned over to pick it and he said, "Oh, no, no, no. We don't pick wildflowers here, we let them go." "Oh!" I said, "Thanks for telling me." Of course since then I've learned a lot about the conservation and preservation. He told us about the beaches and what was public and who had access to it. He was always charming. In those days, he was not married and he was dating different people, and he would bring over the most charming young women and we'd have a lot of fun with them. He was always so thoughtful to everybody who came, and was very hospitable. And he visited us in New Orleans, many, many times.

In 1986, Edmund had emergency heart surgery, and I recall talking to Teddy and saying, "Teddy, this is what happened." And from that day on, every single day, he called the hospital, talked to the doctor, talked to the nurse, talked to me, the entire time that Edmund was in the hospital.

Young: Was this in Louisiana?

Doris Reggie: In Louisiana, at Ochsner in New Orleans. He was so thoughtful and so caring, and would send flowers or a cheer-up gift, but that daily phone call meant so much to me. On another occasion, again when Edmund was having a heart problem—and by then he was married to Vicki [Reggie Kennedy]—in his daily phone calls he would say, “Now look, it’s going to be OK.” He would give me such encouragement. I found that here’s a friend who, if you have a problem, he’s going to help you through it, yet if you’re having a party, you can have a good time.

He’s always been an amazing father, and many times we’d be having a meal with him around the table and his children were there. That was before Vicki, and I’m sure after, but mostly my recollection is before he married Vicki. He and Edmund always had good times and good conversations, and he would turn to us when the children were going to be there, because they were a lot younger, of course, than they are today. He said, “Let’s talk about things that would interest the children.” So then we’d start talking about things that they would like, instead of really heavy world events. Of course you would have some discussions on that, too, or the economy, but it was more things like, maybe we went sailing today. Or what game was played and who won. That impressed me that the entire time his children were there, or any young person was there, his focus was them, to make sure they were interested and they were having a wonderful time.

We’ve told you the story about his mother and the attention he gave her, which was so beautiful. I want to say another little thoughtful gesture of Teddy the man: Whenever we’d finish this wonderful meal and the meal was over, invariably Teddy would say, “OK, everybody pick up a plate and let’s—” This is family. I don’t mean when you’re having guests. “Everybody, let’s pick up a dish and bring it to the kitchen, and give them a little help in clearing the kitchen.” He did that at our home in Nantucket, too, and our housekeeper was so impressed. She just couldn’t believe that he would care that much about lessening her load. I guess maybe that’s all I want to say right now. I just want to say that, as a man, as a person, as a friend, as a son-in-law, you could not ask for a more thoughtful and caring person.

Young: Was he on Squaw Island or at Hyannis Port?

Doris Reggie: Hyannis Port. He was not married any longer.

Young: OK, so this was after his divorce.

Doris Reggie: We would visit him at Hyannis Port, at the big house.

Young: What you said about bringing the children into the conversation at the table—We’ve heard a lot about when *he* was a child, sitting at the table.

Doris Reggie: When he was sitting at the little table?

Young: The little table and then graduation to the big table.

Doris Reggie: Yes, he pointed out the little table to us many times. [*laughs*]

Edmund Reggie: Yet, I think he said to me that the dining room table at Hyannis Port could not hold all of the family, and there was a small table in the window where Jack [John F. Kennedy] and Joe [Kennedy] sat for the meals. I remember him telling me that.

Doris Reggie: Oh, I remember that.

Edmund Reggie: Speaking of that relationship between him and his brothers, he was too young to really know much about his sister Kick [Kathleen Kennedy Cavendish], and about his brother Joe. While he was always deferential about them on those occasions when he spoke about them, which was not a great deal—I didn't hear him talk about those two siblings—his life was wrapped into Jack and Bobby. They nurtured him and brought him into manhood and gave him the example that, in many cases, he has exceeded in his own life. He's exceeded the example that they offered him.

I think that Teddy found himself after the passing of those two heroes in his life, Jack and Bobby. Especially after Bobby's assassination, he almost looked like he had a death wish. He was just going lickety-split, almost like he didn't care, or there was a fatalism. I don't want to be too psychoanalytic about this thing, because I don't know enough about that, but that's how he appeared to me. Then he found himself, and when he did, that's when he became the greatest Senator in the history of the Senate.

Speaking of that, once I told him, "You know, this writer says that you and Daniel Webster are the two greatest Senators who ever served." And he looked at me with a deadpan and said, "What did Webster do?" I'll never forget that because I think it's so funny.

It took Teddy some time to mature, if that's a good word, and the maturity really took after Bobby's death. He accepted the burden of the male in the family, not that he ever denigrated the women in the family, because even to this very day, his concern about them and how they are and how they're getting along and what their children are doing and who's sick, who's not sick, who needs a hand, everything—he has taken that role absolutely beautifully. Prior to Bobby's passing, I don't think he took it that seriously. Bobby looked after Jackie [Kennedy Onassis] and her children more than Teddy did. Teddy was younger and Teddy was a great bon vivant and a funster. He had fun with things.

In the campaign of 1960, Jack's campaign, he was given by Bobby all of the western states, west of the Mississippi river. We didn't carry one of those states where he was the campaign manager. Of course, we never expected to carry any of them. It was his coming out party, as far as his older brothers were concerned, and he did his part. I remember he didn't know how to go off of a ski lift, or whatever you call those things.

Young: Ski jumps.

Edmund Reggie: Ski jumps. He did it because somebody said, "It will be good for you to do it," or "It would help the campaign if you did it," or maybe on a dare—I don't know exactly how it happened. I didn't really know Teddy as well as I did Jack and Bobby. I knew them quite well.

Young: So it was in the '80s that you feel you really came to know him.

Edmund Reggie: That's right. A little bit before that, but I wasn't in the inner circle. I knew him. He knew that I was with his brothers, and for him that gave me a ticket. He really didn't know me or know a great deal about me, but was always very respectful of me. I was strongly advocating that he run earlier than 1980, in the '76 campaign. At the Democratic Convention, a few of us got together to try to convince him to run.

Young: Which convention?

Edmund Reggie: The '76. Of course he chose not to and chose not to meet with us, incidentally, so he didn't falsely lead us down a path. When I wanted him to run again in 1984, when I wanted him to give it another shot, I wasn't his bosom buddy but he trusted me. I remember him asking me to go to Miami to talk to some of his supporters down there, to see if there really was a viable chance in Florida, and I did. It was no great study or anything. I went down there for three nights, two days, something like that. We became closer when we moved to Nantucket. We got to know him and he got to know us.

Young: Remind me again when it was.

Edmund Reggie: Eighty-two. Our first summer was '83.

Doris Reggie: That was when he came over, the summer of '83. But to this day, he doesn't forget that, in 1980, I was a delegate and I was his last holdout. So obviously we were very close then.

Young: You did not yield.

Doris Reggie: I did not yield. I never yielded. Another thing that impressed me a lot about Teddy was whenever he would come over or whenever we'd see him, he always had a briefcase. I don't care if it's a social—

Edmund Reggie: The bag.

Doris Reggie: The bag. If you talk to him and say, "Oh, so-and-so said they really wish you would do such-and-such," he says, "Give me a note." That goes in the briefcase. Everything went into the briefcase, and he had it with him and he studied it. We could have fun that night, but the next morning he was taking care of his business and making the phone calls or recalling what we discussed that we were going to do. He was always in control of it, always to the core a Senator taking care of whatever he was doing.

Edmund Reggie: He was taking care of business and being a bad boy at the same time, in his personal behavior, excesses, but he never gave up the Senate part of it. He was always a very devoted Senator.

Young: Hard working.

Edmund Reggie: Hard working. I've been around politics a long time, and I've never seen anybody as consistently hard working as Ted Kennedy. He's a slave to that bag every day. He brings it and the office loads it up for him.

Young: Where do you suppose this came from, this ability to—some people would call it “compartmenting” your personal life and your professional life, or your career.

Edmund Reggie: I think he never wanted to disrespect his brothers, who had served in the Senate. Jack was his model, and then when Bobby died, he felt that he had to uphold their reputations in the Senate much more than he had given that thought before. You know, he was pretty well known around the Hill. He would have his drinks and sometimes act very wild, but not with the Senate. The Senate was always sacred to him, particularly after Bobby died. Then he had two brothers that he had to think about in that chamber.

Doris Reggie: I can say from personal experience that we had a lot of going out and good times, and Teddy never, ever acted what you would call “wild,” that I ever witnessed. Even though he would have drinks and he would really—he never said something that wasn’t right, or forgot what he said the next morning. He was always crystal clear, so he was always in control. He was having a good time and having fun. He was a party man, but it was always with great respect to whatever people were present. That’s my experience, and we have a lot of experience. I can never call him the wild partier, not in my personal experience.

I remember when he came to New Orleans he wanted to really guard his reputation. Several times, because he had a date, he said, “OK, Doris, you walk with me. I don’t want the press picking anything up, or the tabloids trying to say, ‘Oh, who was he having a date with?’”

Edmund Reggie: Then I’d be walking with his date, and that’s my town.

Doris Reggie: And he would be walking with the date. *[laughs]*

Edmund Reggie: How do you think I felt? I’d be walking, to protect the cause.

Doris Reggie: Here I am, walking with Teddy and, “Oh, OK, that’s who it is.” We would be having a picnic and again he would be having a date. I mean he was certainly allowed to have dates. Even a helicopter flying over, or a cameraman in the bushes—It was unbelievable. But I felt for him. I’d walk with him to the dock, and back from the dock, to try to have a little privacy.

Edmund Reggie: I want to go back to his relationship with his brothers. He had awe for his father. I never met his father, who must have been one of the outstanding men in twentieth-century American life. Even until today, and in all the time that I’ve really known Teddy, he has had awe for his father, knew that he was a brilliant person, but it was never that feeling that he had for his two older brothers. I don’t know what it is. Somebody would have to psychoanalyze that, but he was much more influenced by his brothers than by his father, although he dearly loved his father and I don’t mean to imply that he didn’t. But in his Senatorial life, in his official life, in his adult life, he was much more influenced by the two brothers who survived than his father.

Young: Do you think it was—When you look from a distance at the family situation, as he often points out, he was the last of the lot, although that’s not the way he’d put it. Being the youngest child of a large family has some advantages. It also had some disadvantages. It was a very political family. Do you not think that he always had to prove himself?

Edmund Reggie: Absolutely.

Young: Nothing was taken for granted, and there was a lot of competition in that family, too.

Edmund Reggie: You're absolutely right, Jim. He was never going to match his father, because his father was political and in business took himself up in one generation, a leap to become one of the four richest men in America in his lifetime, and made it all in that one generation, which is phenomenal. I don't think that was ever Teddy's idea. While he loved his father, the goal of being like his father was never as persuasive as the goal of being like Jack and Bobby. They had the influence, and maybe that's because he went into politics at such an early age, and they were already political. Bobby was the Attorney General when he came into the Senate.

His devotion to his sisters is a very admirable thing, but his devotion to his mother was absolutely pure gold. In looking back at the times when we knew her to be alert, I don't think that she had any real persuasiveness about her, except for the Catholic faith. She held that out. He knew how strong it was, and he knew how to get on his knees and say his prayers at night, and felt that if he didn't, then he had done something to violate her, as well as his religious obligations.

Doris Reggie: One wonderful, thoughtful thing he did in that regard, is that he received a rosary from the Pope when he made his First Communion, and he gave that rosary to our granddaughter, Vicki's daughter, Caroline [Raclin], when she made her First Communion. I thought that was a loving, thoughtful thing to do. That's Teddy.

I can remember, too, when he took Patrick [Kennedy] on a religious retreat and liked the books that he read, and came back and gave you, Edmund, copies of those books from that retreat with the Jesuits.

Edmund Reggie: Yes, it was an Indian—from India—Jesuit. I can't recall his name right now. Age is taking me, too. But it had a very serious influence on him as a grown adult Catholic politician.

I think one of the great disappointments in modern times for Teddy is the way the hierarchy in the country, some of the hierarchy, has taken out against him and other Catholic Senators on the issue of abortion or life. Here he is, the world champion in all of the virtues that Jesus enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount, which is his favorite passage in the Bible. Here he is, living those out day-in and day-out, taking political setbacks for it and ridicule for it, and at the same time being the champion of those things, but not getting the support of the Catholic hierarchy just in view of that. Not to give him any accolades, but just in view of that. They always held him to a different standard than what Jesus had said. It was what *they* have said, that is, *their* teaching, which is rather recent. It's not an old ancient teaching about abortion. I think that's been a serious regret with him.

Now, members of the hierarchy who knew him—I'm meaning that they have passed on. When they knew him, they used him in a very good way and supported him, and led him in the direction of good legislation that helped people improve their lives. But there were those who disappointed him in the hierarchy, who gave him no marks at all for his work in handling the poor and the oppressed, and in bringing aid and education and lifting the lot of the poor. They

ignored that, and made the whole test of his political life—just these members of the hierarchy—on that issue of what they determined was the right to life. He would take the position of, how about all the other rights of life?

Young: There's a very strong element in the history in Catholic teaching, of the other humane, ministering to the poor, and so forth. He's often talked about the parables that he lives by.

Edmund Reggie: He lives by Matthew 25.

Young: Yes, Matthew 25. I wanted to go back. When you were talking about his religion—He did not leave his religion, did he?

Edmund Reggie: Never, not for—

Young: Even in terms of observancy after he left the nest of the family?

Edmund Reggie: He stayed with the faith.

Young: Well, the family stayed with him and he stayed with the family, but it was not like when he was a kid and he had to—

Edmund Reggie: Oh no, you're correct.

Young: At some point it became something more than something that was expected to be, for him.

Edmund Reggie: The only bugaboo in his entire political life from the church has been based on an interpretation of right to life. His wife Joan had two miscarriages, and the fetuses were delivered, and the priest refused to baptize them, on the basis that those fetuses did not possess the characteristics of manhood, of personhood, because they were not yet ensouled. Now, having had that experience, having learned his catechism, that was always the teaching of the Catholic Church when he grew up and when I grew up.

Now they've changed the rules and said that all of the other teachings of the church are nourishing, but if you violate that one of them, you perish. The emphasis was placed on it in an effort to whip people into shape on it. It was a newfound thing or a competitive thing between the Catholic Church and Jerry Falwell and his teachings. They didn't want to be left behind, so they took on this holy crusade about abortion. We didn't even hear about it in our church for the first 25 years of my life.

Doris Reggie: For years, Ted would go to daily Mass and Communion. We'd be there sometimes and he would leave early in the morning and go to an early Mass before we awakened. I know he and Vicki used to go together when they first married, in Washington. But he doesn't broadcast it, so I can't really tell you how many years or whether he would still do it, because he does it just from his own faith and belief. He practices his religion beautifully.

Young: Yes, I think he has had strong feelings about wearing your religion on your sleeve, in the public sphere.

Doris Reggie: No, he's not that kind of person.

Young: What I'm trying to get at is—because it's all in the air now. It used to be that you didn't make a big part of your religion in order to get elected.

Edmund Reggie: Oh, and now—

Young: Now it's almost, as Vicki puts it, putting your religion in the public square. And yet, he has not gone along with that.

Doris Reggie: That's not Teddy's style.

Young: He has spoken about it.

Edmund Reggie: It's a natural tension. The hierarchy of the Catholic is basically conservative. It always wants to hold what it's got and does not want to advance in any of the teachings. They want to be as orthodox as they were a thousand years ago. That's the part that Teddy opposes in that one issue, on the so-called right to life, because they are the ultra-conservative and Teddy is the super liberal.

Those in the hierarchy who know him know where he's coming from and would never embarrass him. In fact, he's helped the Archdiocese in Washington in a serious way, with their parochial schools and the Cardinal Archbishops there. This present one and the last one were very close to him because they knew where his real heart was. Overall in his life, the biggest disappointment that I see is that he has been held to a standard by the church that it did not always hold politicians to, with his liberalism and ideas of a liberal and being the liberal in the United States Senate or in the Congress. It's a tension.

Where are we?

Young: Well, I wanted to ask you about sailing, and I wanted to ask you about what the sea is for him.

Edmund Reggie: His brother Jack took him on a sail from Hyannis Port to Nantucket, on his first visit to Nantucket that he could remember, and he could call it out to you, he could tell you where they went, what his brother said. He has an unbelievable recollection of that sail. His brother said something to the effect that, "The salt in our body is equal to the salt of the sea," or something like that, and Teddy believes that. He believes that part of us is the sea. Part of him is the sea, I don't think in a mystical sense, but in an actual sense that he was raised right at the sea.

Sailing is the greatest outdoor sport in his life. He'll watch a football game, he'll watch a baseball game, he'll go to the Red Sox maybe twice in a season, but sailing is everything. Those sailing contests, races that are held at the Cape and Nantucket during the summer, those are his happy, happy days. His sense of competition is served, because he is a very competitive person, so that is served in the other world that he's in, and I think it breathes life into him.

Young: What about sailing other than for competition? I've been on the boat a number of times with him, just alone.

Edmund Reggie: I remember calling Vicki on Christmas Eve, and she said, “It’s snowing.” I said, “Well, let me talk to Teddy.” She said, “No, he’s sailing.” I think he went aground because he couldn’t see where he was there was so much snow. But he never talks about those little misfortunes that he runs into in his boat. I had my little boat, I had a much smaller powerboat, and everything I did, he would tease me about it was the wrong thing and try to nervous me up, to try to make me make other errors. I was always the butt of that joke.

But the sea does something. It restores him. It calms him. I don’t know how much thinking he does out there. I don’t know how much un-interruption allows him to see himself maybe as he can’t on land, but it is the beginning and the end. I told Vicki recently, “Now Vicki, you must understand your pecking order in your husband’s life. First is the Senate, then *Mya*, then Splash, then Sunny, and then you. You must understand you’ve got to stand in line behind four other great loves.”

Doris Reggie: And this week they got a puppy, their third dog. This one is named Captain Courageous, and they’re probably going to call him Cappy. I haven’t heard the latest on that, but it’s a Portuguese Water Dog, black and white, and it’s a puppy. That’s their new baby.

Sailing is so important that, after Teddy’s diagnosis and his treatment, every day he would go on a sail. I think it’s the most therapeutic, restoring thing that he can do, don’t you, Edmund?

Edmund Reggie: Oh yes, I think it has a great effect. Getting back to that father-Teddy-Jack thing—Jack was the sailor; his father had a powerboat. Do you see what I’m saying? That closeness with Jack, not that it’s any psychological thing about a power boat, because he has a small one too, but his big life is sailing and he learned that from Jack. It makes it more precious to him, because I have never seen a person, an adult, as devoted to his brothers and their memory as he is to Jack and Bobby. I mean, as you know, he can’t talk to you without tearing up about them, to any degree of depth of conversation. With his father—

Young: But he doesn’t talk a lot about them, does he?

Edmund Reggie: No, he does not. He’ll mention them: “Jack said this,” or “Yes, but the President did this, and Jack was just in the Senate.” He knows all of that history by heart.

Doris Reggie: One day we were with him in the car. He was driving, and this is before he married Vicki. We were passing Arlington. It was no special occasion. He said, “Let’s stop.” We went for a visit and he teared, and we never said a word and we got back in the car. That was it, but you could tell he was hurting.

Edmund Reggie: This year, and I may be wrong, but I called him on November 22, the anniversary of the President’s death, as I always do. He had been to—I can’t remember.

Doris Reggie: Harvard–Yale.

Edmund Reggie: Yes, a Harvard–Yale game that day and Harvard won. Now, I don’t know if he went earlier to Arlington. He would have to have been in Boston for that game, so if he missed it, it would be the first time that I know of that he missed visiting his brother.

Doris Reggie: But he was back in Washington that night, so it would make you think—

Edmund Reggie: I don't know.

Doris Reggie: I don't know. He taught Vicki to sail, speaking of sailing.

Edmund Reggie: But let me just make my point here. I can't say that that was the first time he's missed, and maybe he did not miss, but I know that every year since his brother's death, every year, he's the fellow who goes out there in the snow or the rain or whatever it is, and in a way makes love to his brother in a most beautiful, sensitive way that you could have.

Go ahead. Where do we go from here?

Young: You were saying he taught Vicki how to sail.

Doris Reggie: Yes, he taught Vicki how to sail. Vicki had never sailed before they married, and now she loves the sea and has her own sailboat. And he's so proud of her, that she won a race or a few races. He takes such pride in Vicki's sailing. I think it's just really sweet.

Edmund Reggie: Her sailing in his boat, in *Mya*—She stepped down at the well of the boat and hurt her foot, which has required surgery twice.

Young: Yes, I know.

Edmund Reggie: In bringing Vicki into the world of sailing so strongly, he had—I don't know the name of the boat but it's an old classic, rebuilt, and since he bought that and had that boat built, some of their friends have—Now she engages in those boat races and loves them. Usually Teddy Jr. is in the boat with her and she's barking and doing. He's doing whatever the protocol is, but it's her victory. This year that victory was engraved on a piece of crystal, maybe silver, in the yacht club, on a race that commemorates him. Both of them, Vicki and Teddy, are on that, whatever it is.

Young: So they're both up there on the wall now.

Doris Reggie: It's the trophy.

Edmund Reggie: Yes, he's made her a real sailor.

I think he would have made a tremendous United States President. I see some of him in the present President, in [Barack] Obama, the President-elect, in that push for excellence, even in the selection of the new Cabinet. It would be the kind of thing that Teddy would do, had he been President. He would have crossed lines as he does in the Senate, not been pure Democrat. He'd have been Democratic in the majority of course, but he would have also had strong support that he would have invited in. That's been the genius of his success in the United States Senate.

Young: Isn't it interesting, and I wonder how people later in history will view this, that on the one hand he is for better or for worse the liberal, and he's red meat for the right wing, spendthrift, and so forth, high living. Yet in the Senate you get a very different picture. If I talk

with other Senators, “Well, of course he’s a liberal.” But virtually all of his major initiatives have been bipartisan in the Senate, throughout his life.

Edmund Reggie: Absolutely. That’s been the key to success.

Young: So how does he do it? What should history make of this?

Edmund Reggie: It’s a pragmatic, can-do attitude, and he gets it done. He does it with such intellectual honesty on his part, while at the same time crossing the aisle to bring in a Republican, normally one who votes strongly against the Democratic issues. He brings him in, and it’s in his show of integrity in dealing with the other man’s position that he is able to lead and pass that legislation, without serious compromise of his principles, but with necessary give-and-take, as he sees it.

Young: But also, finding things on which you can agree, even though your parties are opposed.

Edmund Reggie: That’s him, that’s exactly him. He has a tremendous memory on things that relate to the Senate, back to when he was a freshman Senator in 1962. He can tell you, “Senator so-and-so told me this, and Senator so-and-so told me this.” “It happened this way.” He can relate it to you, and with that historical sense that stays alive with him, he’s able to continue to be that lion liberal that everybody writes about, and at the same time inspire people to get on. They see his integrity and they feel he sees theirs, and it’s trust.

Young: He has an enormous amount of respect from others in the Senate, enormous respect. Everybody wants him to be—to help out with something.

Edmund Reggie: Absolutely.

Young: And that’s the way it has been.

Edmund Reggie: Well, you had some Senators in this last election in November who were running television commercials with Ted Kennedy—Republicans. They wouldn’t have him speaking in the television thing, but it would show him with them, and that was to let the Republicans know in those tough elections that, “Look, I’m OK. I’m not that bad a Republican. Even Ted Kennedy—Look at us. We were talking.” He’s the mantle that they want to wear.

Young: A moment ago you mentioned Obama’s getting the best in a sense, and not being highly partisan about it. You mentioned this in connection with your thinking that Ted would have made a good President. That’s the kind of President he would have been. He would have been a very good President, drawing people in, getting everything done.

Edmund Reggie: He would have brought the best and the brightest in.

Young: But he’s always been doing that, hasn’t he? Throughout the Senate.

Edmund Reggie: Look at his record. That’s right.

Young: He gets himself educated about things. He listens. He would have these dinners, “issue dinners” they were called, picking out people who knew what they were talking about.

Edmund Reggie: Members of the committee on the other side absolutely trusted him and came to those dinners, and felt free to discuss at those dinners. He was not going to take advantage of them in any way and he knew they were not going to take advantage of him. That is the productive way that he looks at what his brother called “the art of the possible.” He would have made some kind of President. He would have made the best President in our history.

He also enjoys something that most politicians don’t enjoy. He comes from wealth and he’s active in the arena. Most people, in the normal sense, don’t come from wealth, and they are in that same arena. There is sometimes a suspicion that they’re voting for a financial interest. I don’t mean a payoff; I mean a financial interest in the legislation that comes out politically for them. He doesn’t have a constituency that furnishes him campaign monies or any other goodies. Of course, he’s a prodigious fundraiser, and people want to be with him and support what he says.

I live in Louisiana. We’re still battling the *Brown* decision in this state. If not openly, we still breathe it internally. But I see up there—for example, the doctors here. If there were an election in Louisiana, he would get a handful of votes from doctors, because they’re still in some ancient day when the AMA [American Medical Association] was putting out that Ted Kennedy wanted to socialize medicine, and that was a very bad thing. I campaigned with him in Massachusetts. Some of his best meetings, fundraisers and so forth, are with the medical profession, because they see what he’s doing for it. But in some parts of the South like my own, we don’t see it because we are dealing in another dimension and era. But he’s not inhibited by any of that. If you will notice his picks, I don’t know if they ever get them in the Deep South.

Young: Yet he managed to get along with a lot of the old southerners in the Senate: Jim Eastland and some of those people, way back.

Edmund Reggie: Absolutely. They’d vote against each other and fight against each other all day, and at five o’clock, have a drink in his office or in the Senator’s office.

Young: Maybe in a sense, he has been a kind of President. He’s certainly accomplished as much during his career in the Senate as most—

Edmund Reggie: —Presidents would hope to do.

Young: Would hope to do.

Edmund Reggie: He has more to show in his record than anybody that we know, in their record.

Young: He’s sort of like our other President, in many ways. He was always there. He was there before and is going to survive.

Doris Reggie: That’s a good point.

Young: If he can’t get everything in two years, four years, eight years....

Edmund Reggie: He'll come back to the well.

Young: He'll come back and come back. That's one of the things that makes him such an unusual figure in history.

Edmund Reggie: Right now, apropos of what you just said about him being the President, he will have introduced on the first day of the Congress a healthcare bill that will affect every man, woman, and child in the country, that he has been preaching for since the '60s. He'll offer it—even with his present sickness. He won't get every word he's asking for but he'll get a bill passed, just as sure as we're sitting here, and it's done on the shoulders that have just been lifting that cause all those years.

Young: He's really been concentrating on that now, I think. That's his project. It's been his project for so many years but it seems now, it's really mostly, if not all—

Edmund Reggie: Because more Americans now see the need for it. Look at the automobile thing we're in right now: The big difference in the salaries that are being paid, that are being fussed about, is really healthcare. That's the difference. If you can take healthcare and give it to the employees up there in Michigan, it would be about a dollar or two different an hour, after years of bargaining by the litigators.

Young: Turning to another subject: Do you feel that people looking back and trying to understand this man and these times—He was a great impact on them. But also looking at his personal life, the tragedies, his ability to survive so many really awful things that happened—

Edmund Reggie: In the Catholic Church we call those things Beatitudes. They're the basic blessings. He is responsible for putting on the record books more bills that further the cause of the Beatitudes than any Senator in the history of the United States Congress.

Young: Did he change? In what direction did he change, or did he not change at all when he married Vicki, when he got to know Vicki?

Edmund Reggie: Well yes, he has.

Young: Should that be thought of as a real change in his life? Or maybe one should think, what would he be without her?

Edmund Reggie: Basically, Teddy and Vicki have one of the great love affairs of all time. She has unlimited love, respect, and care for Teddy, and he has equal love, respect, and care for Vicki. He helped raise her children in a way that was not one degree different from what he did for his own children. She's the other half of his soul and he's the other half of hers. They help each other. She helps him. I think when he married Vicki he decided that—She is a good person, if I must say, about my daughter. He was basically a good person all the time, but had fun; he was a bachelor and did all those fun things. But once he married Vicki there was no more of that wildness, and instead of that energy being exercised, it became exercised in his work and his life and his marriage and his children.

Young: You might think that it would have been hard for this man to settle down.

[*interruption*]

Young: You might have thought it might have been hard for him to change his life by that time, by the time he married Vicki, or got to know Vicki, rather than continuing on the same path. I'm not saying it would have—

Edmund Reggie: Except that he always had those basic principles of good life: the Beatitudes, the biblical teaching. He might have glossed over some of it, but it was all there, and when he found Vicki it was just a matter of bringing it to the fore, perhaps, exclusively.

Young: Was he a lonely man?

Edmund Reggie: Oh yes, I think so.

Young: You just think back—During these times of adversity, real tragedy, not involving Joan. Whom did he have to turn to?

Edmund Reggie: Well, he didn't have anybody to turn to and that was the problem, but on the other hand, all of his siblings and their children were turning to him.

Young: Exactly.

Edmund Reggie: I think that was a stabilizer.

Doris Reggie: I remember very well one night we were out to dinner with him, the three of us, and his driver came to pick him up and left Edmund and me standing there, and he turned around and waved, and he looked so lonely and was walking to the car to go back to an empty house. My heart went out because I know what a family man he is. Edmund and I have talked about it. "Oh, how sad, he's so lonely. He's going home all by himself." Maybe that sounds dramatic but many times I would have that feeling, that he loved our family life and wished he had the same, I believe.

Young: That's an insight that's important to get.

Edmund Reggie: His great joke is that when he came back from his honeymoon he said to me, "I thought I married Doris when I married Vicki." And Vicki said, "And you got Edmund."
[*laughter*]

Doris Reggie: When he was courting Vicki, he'd lean over and say, "I love your daughter." And I would say, "That makes me happy." It was so sweet.

Edmund Reggie: Theirs is a very good marriage and I think that she brought a stability to the home that he wanted and that he searched for.

Young: They're partners, too.

Edmund Reggie: They are, very much.

Doris Reggie: In every way.

Edmund Reggie: Very, very much. She reads him, he reads her. They're on the same wavelength. She's very smart, he's very smart. No one knows the Senate like he does. And Vicki is a smart person. She has a very good academic record, you know, and she lives that and is able to—She has been able to integrate her life into his easier. She comes from a political family, not on the scale of the Kennedys, but country yokels who practiced politics. So it wasn't new to her.

Doris Reggie: They actually had so many likes, dislikes and way of life. They both loved to travel, had been to Europe, and had an appreciation for food and art. They found they had so much in common. In their life together, they love to do the same things. He proposed at an opera, *La Bohème*. Her boat is named *La Bohème*. They're very romantic. All along, they found they had similar likes and dislikes.

Edmund Reggie: Before she married, her favorite opera was *Madame Butterfly*. We even got her out of law school once to take her up so we would see *Madame Butterfly*. I don't think she ever thinks about *Madame Butterfly* now.

Doris Reggie: I don't think so either.

Edmund Reggie: For some reason everything is *La Bohème*.

Doris Reggie: She certainly shoulders a lot of the—He has respect for her, so she's taken over one whole phase, which every wife does, I mean the social aspect, the entertaining, and running the house. That obviously had to be a help to him, too, because he ran a wonderful house before, but he was in charge of everything. He would entertain.

Edmund Reggie: They love each other's friends, too. That's a good thing they have. As close as he is to Lee [Fentress], for instance, she's that close to his wife.

Doris Reggie: To Diane [Fentress], absolutely.

Edmund Reggie: And you can see that in a number of other of his friends and also in a number of her friends that he cares for and enjoys.

Young: Well, I thought it was important to get that insight on the record, about the unfulfilled part of his life that's not evident before he married Vicki. It's not evident. Very few people have observed that about him because his life appeared to be so filled, after-hours, and with family, that they have not noticed or not observed that here was a man who didn't have anybody to go home to, in that sense.

Doris Reggie: Yes, that's right.

Young: So I think it's very important to get those.

Edmund Reggie: She has become his alter ego, and to such a degree that I'm not sure how he would be able to have handled this sickness without Vicki. Now, I'm a father talking and you must discount the paternal bias and prejudice in her favor, but I don't think he could have handled it without Vicki. Importantly, when they married, he wanted to be faithful and truthful, on the up and up with Vicki. That's the only marriage she would have with him and he stuck to it, and that's why the two of them are really one. If you talk to him, you know what Vicki's thinking, and if you talk to Vicki, you know what he's thinking.

Young: And when they don't agree, they don't mind disagreeing either. *[laughter]*

Edmund Reggie: The good part of it is that he's not a pushover, and he can't fool.

Young: She's not a pushover either, from what I can see.

Edmund Reggie: You're exactly right.

Doris Reggie: No. She's got a studied opinion and she will express it, and she has a reason for it and she'll say it and he'll do the same, which is great. They have that mutual respect.

Edmund Reggie: If there is one thing, from a good friend—and I consider him to be my best friend—If there's one thing I would want for him, it's for those high churchmen to understand his position a little more in depth and with a little more Christian charity. Now, I'm not saying all of them, but those who have lashed out at him publicly and things like that. That's been one of the mortal injustices that have been done to him in his career.

In politics, he's always on top there. As I said earlier, he's a liberal in the highest and best sense, not a promiscuous liberal. He is a liberal in the high sense. He sees the feelings of people genuinely. He has informed his conscience by great study and reading and understanding that allow him to have that position. To my personal regret, some of the members of the Catholic hierarchy are not willing to see that or give him any points for those. The way that they dismiss that is they say, "You can have all of that nourishment from all of those Beatitudes," that he is the leading driving force in this country on, "but because he doesn't recognize the church's present teaching on life, all the good is wasted." Well, you can't judge anybody like that. I mean, what's good is good; what's gold is gold.

Young: I don't think that's going to hurt him in history.

Edmund Reggie: It hurts his feelings in life.

Young: It hurts his feelings though. But doesn't he have a lot of sympathetic priests and others in the church?

Edmund Reggie: Oh, very many.

Young: And among some of the bishops?

Edmund Reggie: Very many. The last two Cardinal Archbishops of Washington are very close friends of his, *very* close friends, where each can exchange with the other, truthful feelings and observations, but they're the only ones of any standing that make a difference.

If you pardon my saying this on your tape, I have friends here in Louisiana who don't like Teddy's voting record, and they always want me to tell him: "You'd better tell your son in-law that he's doing this," "You'd better tell your son in-law he's making this," and, "You'd better tell your son in-law—" I took it for several years, and I finally learned the way to stop it. When they tell me about what he ought to do, my answer is, "Do you think Ted Kennedy gives a shit about what you think?" That stops the conversation. That stops it dry. [*laughs*] And I love it.

Young: I'd keep that on the tape.

Edmund Reggie: Keep it on the tape. He's a man of great conviction and I love him. His sense of history, we should just say a little more about that. He is so motivated by the Founders. That's almost a Bible to him. Vicki was looking for a gift for him, and she wanted to do the best thing and the greatest thing, and it was an original copy of the *Madison Papers*. She knows her husband and she knows what he would love more than anything in the world. Those Founders and what they thought is where he wants—that's his compass.

Young: Any further thoughts?

Edmund Reggie: Yes, one little last thing, the human. I lost my brother about two months ago. He was my last sibling. Teddy called me and cried. He knew my brother very well and my brother loved him and wrote him, and they had exchanged letters and all of that. I don't know whether it's the time of his life that he was so deeply moved, but it just shows me that a lot of that was in his heart, for my heart. That's the way I took it. He knew what pain it was for me. When you have that much sensitivity, you are a marvelous person, and he has it. He's a good human being. He has never voted for, never sponsored, and never put his name *ever* to anything that reduced the human person. Every piece of his legislation is to enhance the human person, and that's one of the great, great things about his career.

Young: Thank you very much.

Edmund Reggie: Thank you.

Young: Here is a postscript to the interview we've just closed off.

Edmund Reggie: I just think it's kind of an interesting thing. One day he called me and said, "You told me about my father and about Juan Trippe with Pan American Airlines. Can you get me that again?" And I said yes. I was in Nantucket. I called my secretary and I said, "Go to my house and get the autobiography of Juan Trippe." She did, and I told her what pages and she found them and Xeroxed them and I sent them to him. Well, he thought they were so good that he wanted to read that to his siblings at his father's birthday, demonstrating some of his father's character, at which he laughed a little, not ridiculed, but laughed.

Juan Trippe was a young pilot who saw a great future in air travel, and he really became a national leader in air travel. He wanted to see Mr. Kennedy, so he flew in his little seaplane.

There were no airports. He flew in his little seaplane and faced the house, got out of the seaplane, brought his suitcase, was greeted by Mr. Kennedy, put the suitcase upstairs in his room, came downstairs, and he said, “Let’s take a walk on the beach.”

Mr. Kennedy, at that point, was the Chairman of the U.S. Maritime Commission. He said, “You know, there’s a great future coming for air. You’re landing on the water and it ought to be in the orbit, under the jurisdiction, of the Maritime Commission. Trippe said, “Oh no, Mr. Kennedy, I don’t think so. Air is going to outstrip water transportation.” They debated it while they were walking and finally Mr. Kennedy turned to him and said, “Well, do you mean this is your irrevocable position?” He said, “It is.” Mr. Kennedy said, “We have nothing else to talk about. You may go get your suitcase.” Trippe went upstairs, got his suitcase—and this last part I love—Jack and Joe were in the water, turning that little airplane around, with the pontoons, and it took off. Isn’t that a fabulous story? Doesn’t that tell you something? That tells you something about Mr. Kennedy that’s just tremendous.