EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH TERRI HADDAD ROBINSON

July 22, 2009
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Interviewer
Janet Heininger

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TRANSCRIPT

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Heininger: This is an interview with Terri Haddad Robinson on July 22, 2009, in Washington. Let's start at the very beginning, and tell me when you first met Ted Kennedy.

Robinson: I was National Committeewoman of the Young Democrats in Massachusetts, and in 1958, you only had to be 18 years old. The legal voting age was 21. [*laughing*] I was secretary to the Governor [Foster Furcolo]. I know this sounds strange, but in the early days, whoever volunteered, typed the fastest, and took shorthand always got the best jobs.

I happened to sit next to Ted Kennedy at the Massachusetts State Convention where his brother, Senator John F. Kennedy, was giving a speech. I had just taken a photo, a Polaroid, and was peeling a bulb from the camera. For some reason, the bulb burst in my hand and this very handsome man, who was the campaign manager for his brother in 1958, in the U.S. Senate race in Massachusetts, brushed me off, and said, "Are you all right?" I was taken aback. I had interrupted the speech. I recall asking someone, "Who *is* this man?" I couldn't help it; it was just amazing. [*laughing]* I didn't see him again until the 1960 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles.

I attended the convention with the Governor in Los Angeles. I might have passed Ted somewhere between the convention hall and the Ambassador Hotel. It was a great honor to witness President Kennedy's nomination.

Heininger: And you were only 22 at that point.

Robinson: Right. Then, after Jack Kennedy was nominated, the Governor was caught by surprise—The roll call went to right down to the Wyoming delegation, as you know. I was told Kennedy did not have votes for that second ballot, so they had to win on the first ballot. The nomination went to President Kennedy. No one truly knew how to honor Kennedy. The Governor said, "Why don't we have a breakfast?" I said all right, and invited 1,250 delegates to breakfast. This is the now famous breakfast held the day after the nomination. The unfortunate problem was, I received the bill and I sent it to the JFK campaign, and then to the State Commission. I'm not sure that bill was ever paid! [*laughing*] That's just a little background on my first exposure to national politics. I thought, *This is very interesting. It's a little bigger picture!*

When President Kennedy was elected in November 1960, there was a discussion about who to appoint to his Senate seat. Governor Furcolo had the authority, and flew down to Georgetown and met with the President-elect at his home. It was December of 1960 the decision was made it would be Ben Smith. No one knows what truly happened in that discussion, but at that time Ted Kennedy was a 28-year-old DA. They were waiting. Apparently they wanted Ted to run in 1962.

Heininger: Wow, even then.

Robinson: Even then. The Governor was shocked. He had run for the Senate that November against [Leverett] Saltonstall, the senior Republican Senator, but Furcolo lost the election. His backup position was to appoint himself. I was Secretary to Governor Furcolo and had to handle the eventual swearing in of Ben Smith [II], the former mayor of Gloucester. Smith was a very good friend and Harvard classmate of President Kennedy's. I kept hearing the name, "Ted Kennedy," who was an assistant district attorney at the time. I saw him occasionally and I couldn't quite understand how my boss, the Governor, was unable to appoint himself. *Now* we understand politics. The Governor unfortunately was sick the day of the swearing in, and did not attend. I was standing there with Ben Smith, six feet five, and I had to find someone to swear him in. I called the Secretary of State's office and found Mary [A. R.] Hines, who was four feet eleven. I felt her strain. She and Ben Smith returned to the Governor's office for the swearing in.

Why am I telling you this? Because I thought, *There goes my future*. I was given a lifetime appointment to work at the State House, as the Executive Director of the Mass Transportation Commission. As I began the job, I went to the Inaugural in Washington. I was walking down the hall of the old Senate Office Building. It was January 19, the day before Kennedy's inauguration; I saw the name "John Kennedy" on the door and I thought, *I am going into this office; I'd love to see it.*

As I stepped in someone asked, "Are you the girl who's here to be interviewed?" The man who asked me that question was Milton Gwirtzman. He hired me to work for Ben Smith. I told Milton my background. He said, "No one's coming down from Massachusetts to work in the new Senate office." They all wanted to go to the White House. I went home and packed my bags. My one reference was Congressman Tip [Thomas P.] O'Neill. This would be interesting. I wanted to work in the Senate.

I left Boston February 14, 1961 to work for Ben Smith. We had a very small staff, maybe 12 people. Milton was doing press, legislation, and speechwriting, and I worked with him very closely. It was great to be working for my Senator from Massachusetts.

During his term, Ben Smith was a good soldier. He was a great human being, a lovely man. He kept his word and said he would not run for reelection to the U.S. Senate. One day, I believe in the winter of 1961, John Culver and Ted Kennedy walked into the office to meet with Senator Smith. Ted Kennedy shook my hand, introduced himself, along with his friend, John Culver, with whom he had gone to Harvard. They had a private meeting with Ben Smith. Ted left for Africa on a fact-finding mission. Within a few days, word was sifting through the office that possibly Ted was preparing to run for the Senate.

We were instructed, of course, never to do anything to help him. Everyone kept asking, "Are you sure Ben Smith's not going to run?" And I assured them, "No, he isn't."

I was born and raised in Quincy, Massachusetts, and was very excited that I lived in a city that had two Presidents: John Adams and John Quincy Adams. We loved living near the Cradle of Liberty, Boston. It's just so personal to have come from a state that had recognized so many important issues early on, and we are patriotic Americans. My parents were immigrants and they were very proud to be citizens. They came from Lebanon in 1917 and they really cared about our country. That was passed on to me from the Boston Irish and Lebanese, and it worked. I *loved* working in politics and Washington.

I got a call from Eddie Martin in June, 1962 when Senator Kennedy was nominated. Eddie Martin said, "I'd love for you to come up here and help me with the press." I said, "Oh, my God, Eddie, I'd be thrilled." Eddie and I both lived in Quincy and were friends. He was a reporter when we first met in 1957. When I went in and told Milty, he looked at me and was shocked. He didn't want to lose me, and I didn't want to leave him. He said, "You'd better go in and talk to the Senator." I spoke to Senator Ben Smith and asked, "Could I do it, please? I want to help Ted Kennedy." At the time, John Kennedy was President, and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] was Attorney General. We had some contact with the White House. It may surprise you, but the White House staff, at the time, was less than 40 people.

Heininger: [*laughing*] The days when it was a small staff.

Robinson: Right.

Heininger: They are gone forever.

Robinson: When I arrived at Ted Kennedy headquarters the summer of 1962 I was struck by the age of the staff. The Senator was 30 years old; Eddie Martin was the dean. The campaign manager, Steve Smith, Ted's brother in-law, was 38, and there were young, hardworking girls, men, women, volunteers, recent graduates, like Charlie Tretter and Jimmy King on advance. I met this man named Ed Moss. Ed was on loan to the campaign from the telephone company. You could do those things in the 60s. Moss traveled daily with the Senator.

The campaign was one of the most exciting, fun experiences one could witness. We were making history but we didn't know it! We were all pretty innocent. Reporters from around the world would come into the office. We were separated by one wall from Eddie McCormack [Jr.]'s office. He was our challenger.

McCormack would have a tape running all day on the sidewalk, on Tremont Street, Boston, bellowing, "It's been 'so many days' since I challenged Ted Kennedy to a debate," ridiculing him, trying everything to claim he was qualified. I had friends on both sides. Eddie McCormack had been the Attorney General when I worked for the Governor. I'd see him and he would always give me "the look." He kept saying things to me like, "Was that you who called in last night on that talk show?" And I'd say no. He'd say, "Terri, don't bullshit an old bullshitter. I know your voice." [*laughing*] I had just accused him of receiving money from the *Dothan Alabama Eagle*, a segregated newspaper.

Eddie Martin was one of the greatest human beings and friends you could ever meet—You've heard this again and again—and I was so proud to work for Eddie. When it came time to debate Eddie McCormack in South Boston, they couldn't find a neutral sponsor for the debate. Eddie and I spoke to Steve Smith, "How about the Young Democrats?" "Great idea! Let's do it." I was still National Committeewoman for the YDs and made the call. The YDs sponsored the debate and distributed the tickets. This was what's interesting about this debate between Eddie McCormack and Ted Kennedy: "most of the Young Democrats were with Eddie McCormack." They already knew him.

Heininger: Really?

Robinson: We drove to that hall that night in South Boston, Eddie, the Senator, and me. There were 900 tickets: 300 went to the Kennedy campaign, 300 went to the McCormack campaign, and 300 went to the Young Democrats to distribute. The hall was slightly lopsided. While we sat there and watched Ted Kennedy challenged by Eddie McCormack, we thought we were losing. We could feel it. The applause for McCormack was resounding.

Heininger: But not knowing the audience had been stacked.

Robinson: Right. But stacked in an honest way. It's funny, but the locals always stick together. Once you go to Washington, they forget about you. Eddie McCormack kept his pulse on politics in Massachusetts and had great local support.

That debate was famous! Eddie McCormack closed with this line, "If your name was 'Edward Moore,' your candidacy would be a joke." All of us were just stunned! How could you talk to Ted Kennedy like that? When we left, Eddie Martin, the Senator, and I were in the car. We went into the headquarters and the switchboard was all lit up. It was amazing. At *that* moment we realized all the Irish mothers and others were calling in, saying, "How could you talk to Ted Kennedy like that?" It astounded us! It gave them the excuse they needed. They wanted to vote for Ted. They realized he was partly there because of his name, but Ted Kennedy was such a gentleman that the debate turned to his favor. That was the turning point in the campaign. We got a break.

Ted Kennedy ran against the nephew of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, [John] McCormack, and his next challenger was Henry Cabot Lodge [Jr.]'s son [George Cabot Lodge II]. During that time, we had no visible contact, of course, with the White House or the Attorney General, because we were being watched closely. We were truly on our own. Ted Kennedy was at every factory gate or subway stop at 5:30 every morning. And campaigned until midnight. We were all exhausted, running on adrenaline; our adrenaline was just racing.

Heininger: Was Ted not even having any private contact with his brothers?

Robinson: If he did, we were never informed.

Heininger: Really?

Robinson: Yes. We were so careful. One day I got a call from someone at the Peace Corps, Bill Haddad—my maiden name was Haddad0. He said, "I want to tell you that we're thinking about a

domestic Peace Corps. Maybe we could test it through one of Ted's speeches." That was the only time that I felt anyone sent us anything. "Maybe just to see if a program like this could pass Congress, and maybe it's an issue he might be interested in." Having his brother in-law, Steve Smith, was close enough, I guess.

I remember John Chancellor walking in; he was the host of the NBC *Today Show*. We had press coming from all over the world. Election night, there were 136 reporters. A reporter walked in from New Rhodesia and asked for credentials. I said, "We don't do credentials. We're all going to the Parker House Hotel for the results."

Heininger: And you were still only maybe 24 years old?

Robinson: Yes.

Heininger: Still very young.

Robinson: And there was John Chancellor, Sander Vanocur, [Frank] McGee, just from NBC. All of them were there election night. It was the big leagues; here we were, waiting for the results.

In the middle of the campaign, the Cuban missile crisis happened, and that was really an historic moment. I remember Marianne Means came into the office that day, and wanted to interview the Senator. I said, "He's in the Berkshires, but he's driving in if you could wait." She was a White House correspondent for Hearst. All of a sudden we realized the significance of the Cuban missile crisis. I had the only television in the headquarters and Steve Smith called and said, "We're coming down to watch the speech in your office." That's where Ted Kennedy watched President Kennedy give that famous speech. I recall how frightening it was and what a terrible moment our country faced. Those were three days that I will never forget. You've probably heard many people say this. We couldn't sleep. We thought it was over! The Senator looked shocked.

Heininger: It was very frightening.

Robinson: It was very frightening and it was real. When I saw the Senator's face, I thought to myself, *We may never even see the end of this campaign.* That was a very significant moment. Many things happened in 1962; there was a lot that he had to endure. Joan [Bennett Kennedy], his wife, was wonderful; she was campaigning constantly. They had two young children. I'm trying to recall the ages of the children. Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy, Jr.] was 18 months, maybe Kara [Kennedy] was three. Joan didn't have a press person, so Eddie and I did her press also.

Heininger: Did she like campaigning?

Robinson: She did, and she was excited about it. It wasn't as stressful in a way as it has now become. Bobby Fitzgerald's wife [Sally Fitzgerald], handled Joan. His first cousin was Bobby Fitzgerald, who also worked on the campaign. We had people assigned to Joan, and Mrs. Kennedy did a wonderful job. She was a beautiful woman. She was poised, quiet, and very talented. She was an accomplished pianist. At that time there seemed to be a closeness in the marriage.

Let me add this, just to give you some insight. We would go to the Cape on the weekends. There was nothing called an "expense account"; we always paid our own way. We drove down and went sailing with the Senator occasionally. We would sail over to Martha's Vineyard with Joe Gargan, Eddie, Culver, and me. I remember laughing because they just got in the boat and left, with no maps or anything, just took a speedboat, and said, "We're going to the Vineyard to have a lobster." I had never eaten a lobster in my life, so Senator, if you're listening, you taught me how to eat a lobster. I'll never forget it.

Heininger: They're not easy to eat if you've never eaten one before.

Robinson: I know, right.

Heininger: How *do* you get him out of there?

Robinson: What people forget is that—Senator Kennedy was elected in November of '62, but he was still filling the unexpired term of his brother. He was sworn in the next day as soon as possible. We never had much time off. Luckily I kept an apartment in Washington, a little studio in Foggy Bottom, so the girls would say, "Oh, Terri, can we live with you?" I said, "Sure, come on." They all eventually rented apartments in my building. There were about four of us who lived in the same building. We worked relentless hours.

In November 1962, a van came and packed up the campaign office in Boston. We flew down and our files would follow. We were going to be one happy family. I recall receiving a phone call asking, "Where is the Mayflower moving van?" I said, "I don't know; I'm in Washington. I flew down." They said, "Well, the Senator bought his wife some pearls for their anniversary and we can't find them. They think they packed them up and they are in one of the boxes." They stopped the van on the New Jersey Turnpike and went through all the boxes to find the anniversary present!

Heininger: They found them?

Robinson: Yes—they found them.

Heininger: Well, that's good.

Robinson: Isn't that sweet? He was so happy!

Heininger: That's good.

Robinson: We walked into the Senate office—and in those days all you had was carbon paper. There was one automated electric typewriter in the basement of the Senate Office Building—and someone said, "There are 3,000 letters here." I said, "Oh?" and we started opening the mail. My job was to work for John Culver and to do the press. John Culver and I shared an office. He was the legislative assistant; our office was right next to the Senator's, with Anne Strauss and Sarah Milam. It was the four of us, in one room. Junior Senators didn't get VIP [very important person] office space.

The rule was that no one outside of Massachusetts would have an interview. We kept everyone under control. The press corps was much smaller in those days. The *Boston Globe* did not have an office. If you wanted to reach Bud [Wilfrid C.] Rodgers, you would call Congressman Tip O'Neill's office. Reporters would be sitting in the reception room. Only a few reporters covered Congress.

Heininger: No national news, only Boston news?

Robinson: Only Massachusetts interviews.

Heininger: That's interesting. Why did he make the decision to do that?

Robinson: The Senator had to run again for reelection in 1964, and the people in Massachusetts require total attention. They don't want you to "go Washington" on them. "If you want our vote, you're going to have to earn it." He went home every weekend for two years.

By this time we had a nice relationship, and the Senator asked me to do other duties beyond just legislation and the press. When we walked into the stark Senate office, there was no budget for "decorating", but he said, "I'd like to decorate my office with historical Massachusetts furnishings. Terri, could you do this?" I said, "Oh, of course." I was living in a studio apartment and wasn't a decorator, but I loved history.

John Creehan, a friend of President Kennedy, also loved history. Together we went through Faneuil Hall and other historic sites. Museums and companies would voluntarily lend us items. For example, I went over to the USS *Constitution* and said, "Could I borrow a couple of cutlasses?" And they said, "Of course."

Heininger: "Sure, take our swords."

Robinson: Right. They're still there.

Heininger: Oh, my God. "Take our swords; put them up in the office." Wow. I don't know whether you'd get that to happen now.

Robinson: I know. I just like to give you the atmosphere of the 60s.

Heininger: No, it's fascinating, fascinating.

Robinson: It was interesting. I took the swords and had the carpenter in the Senate Office Building make a small shield out of wood and put the cutlasses through them. We put them above the fireplace in the Senator's office. Then I found out that the *Spirit of '76*, the painting, was owned by Campbell's Soup Company. They gave us a print. We also had the desk of William Barton Rogers, who was the first President of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. The Chatham Lamp Company donated lamps with shades made from Coast Guard charts. I believe he was using President Kennedy's Senate desk, and there were still some things in the middle drawer, which I was able to retrieve—

Heininger: Really?

Robinson: Yes. Items the President left I kept aside for the Senator.

Heininger: Wow.

Robinson: That was the innocence of the time. The Polaroid Company gave us a Polaroid camera, and I would take photographs with our little Polaroid. That was how it was. I recall Bill Green [III], who was 25 years old and wanted to run for Congress in Philadelphia. The Senator called him up. Green's father had died and he was going to succeed him and the Senator wanted to help him, so we had him come to the office to take a picture with the Senator. They took that picture and made a billboard out of it, out of that little Polaroid photo.

A few times I was asked to do things out of the ordinary. I'm not sure what year this was, but we had a private meeting with Madame [Ngo] Nhu. The Senator dictated a confidential memorandum he wanted to give to the President. I had to type it directly into the typewriter. It had to be perfect, with no typos, no erasures, and no copy.

Heininger: It was all carbon paper. No corrections—wow.

Robinson: Yes, I remember being witness to several things that I thought were significant. The Senator would invite us, occasionally, to join in the *Caroline*. Sometimes the Senator would walk in and say, "The *Caroline*'s going to Boston. Do you want to jump on?" This was the private family plane, and we would just leave our desks to go home. There are so many memories.

One time I said to the Senator, "John Culver is getting difficult to work with." He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, he's very short-tempered—you know that. I'm trying to do the press and he won't allow me to answer the phone from 10:00 to 12:00 and 2:00 to 4:00, because he doesn't want to be disturbed." We're in the same office, but I had to talk to the press. He kept saying, "Well, don't worry; he might not be here too long." Certainly he wasn't. A man walked in one day and said, "I want to see John Culver." He was from Iowa, and by the end of the day I realized that that man, who ended up being Senator [Richard C.] Clark, had asked John to run for Congress. John Culver became a Congressman and U.S. Senator from Iowa.

We also helped John Tunney in his first election to Congress from California. Everyone wanted a piece of Ted Kennedy. He and Eddie Moss went to the Columbus Day Parade to march for Mayor [Thomas] D'Alesandro [Jr.] in Baltimore. That, of course, is Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi's family.

I had a good relationship with Congressman Tip O'Neill. I had known him previously, and frequently had dinner with him and Congressman Eddie Boland, who was also close to the Senator. We had a very congenial Massachusetts delegation. Bobby Baker was in charge of the floor at the time, and was the Senate Secretary. He did a good job. As they say, the trains ran on time!

Heininger: How did it work, carrying over some of Ben Smith's staff, like Joe McIntyre?

Robinson: Joe McIntyre was never happy working for Ted.

Heininger: Was it a personality clash or stylistic differences?

Robinson: I don't know. Ted Kennedy was a pretty smart politician, but demanding. You've always heard that Ted had the best staff. You can't make a mistake. You see, McIntyre had been in Washington for 30 years. He didn't understand how you *get* elected, exactly, and that was *everything* to Ted. We had to run again in two years. I kept something on my desk that said "286,000 votes." I think that's what we won by. Small margin!

Our staff was probably 14 people; the White House staff might have been 40. I remember when he gave his speech on civil rights. Nineteen sixty-four?

Heininger: It was '64.

In that early setting up of the office, there were a couple of people who—

Robinson: Barbara Souliotis, of course, was the most wonderful woman. She was his scheduler.

Heininger: Right. Where had she come from?

Robinson: Barbara Souliotis was hired first. The Senator at that time was assistant district attorney. Eddie Martin was asked by Hal [Harold] Clancy of the *Herald Traveler* (through Judge [Francis X.] Morrissey and Joe Kennedy) to keep an eye out and help Ted. Barbara worked for him in a small office. I believe it was at 122 Bowdoin Street. This small apartment was across the street from the State House and that was the "legal address," the voting address, of President Kennedy. Then it matured into the campaign. And we moved. There's no one who's been there longer than Barbara Souliotis, and no one more devoted or who deserves a greater honor. She was his political mentor. She ran that Boston office! She's just a tremendous person, a very good woman. "Girl"? My God! We're all women, aren't we?

Heininger: Yes, we are.

Robinson: In fact, I also might have been the first woman press assistant on Capitol Hill. I was paid $7,500 a year, but I didn't complain. My previous position paid me a higher salary, but I was thrilled to be there.

Ted Kennedy was very nice to his staff and always very polite. He had a great sense of humor. You've heard it said a million times. He taught me laughter. He taught me faith and strength. His strength was unlike anything I had ever seen, especially during the time of the assassination.

Heininger: During this very early time, Joe McIntyre stayed and wasn't necessarily all that happy. You had this young whippersnapper and an old Senate veteran. Milton came over. He'd come over during the campaign and had worked for Ben Smith, and you had worked for Ben Smith.

Robinson: Right. It was McIntyre, Ben Smith—

Heininger: And there was a caseworker?

Robinson: Joe McIntyre I thought had a friendship with Kenny O'Donnell, and I believe he recommended him to Smith. My day-to-day interaction was with the Senator. Joe stayed out of my area. Even though he was the chief of staff he was a bit like a duck out of water somehow. Senator Kennedy and I could relate to Massachusetts. Joe wasn't entrenched in the political part of it. I wasn't paying much attention to it, I had my own press area. The Senator eventually hired Bill Evans.

Heininger: When did he make the decision to put Bill Evans in?

Robinson: Nineteen sixty-three.

Heininger: Okay. Where did Bill Evans come from?

Robinson: Possibly California. He had worked somewhere on the Presidential campaign. Bill was an odd choice, let's just say, a very odd choice. I think Claude Hooton and he somehow were doing some Western states in 1960. I never really knew Bill Evans. He was jealous of my relationship with the Senator. I had the Massachusetts contacts. Those things happen, and as a woman on Capitol Hill in those days, you had to watch your step. That was the only part that was uncomfortable.

Heininger: What was it like being a woman on Capitol Hill in those days?

Robinson: We always dressed—There was a beauty parlor downstairs, thank God, that was inexpensive. You had your hair done and wore skirts. Being a woman on Capitol Hill did have its perks. I had peanut butter in my refrigerator and went out to dinner every night. I guess everybody wanted to meet Senator Kennedy and maybe they might meet President Kennedy or Robert Kennedy. So our staff were pretty popular. Through it, I will tell you, I have had the chance to meet a lot of dignitaries. I knew all the original seven astronauts. [*laughing*]

Heininger: Wow!

Robinson: Yes! Some of the people I met through Ted Kennedy became my friends. Oh, God, I'm getting old, aren't I? But there were so many, the Kingston Trio—

Heininger: Wow. I grew up to the Kingston Trio.

Robinson: Exactly. The actors, all the baseball players, the Celtics. I remember once we got a call and the President invited us over to the White House living quarters to meet Carol Channing. We played piano and sang. Most evenings the Senator always went home at 7:30. He instructed me to call Joan and say, "I'm coming. Don't put the children to bed. I want to read to them before they go to bed." He was the most devoted father. Yes, a very good husband.

When he went to Russia he returned with a beautiful coat, a sable coat I think, for Joan. I remember the gifts, but there was a problem and we could feel it. Occasionally we would drive the Senator to the airport. All of these things, I guess, are barred today, but we were all one family unit, helping, working together, and devoted to the Senator. If he had to catch a plane, you'd jump in the car with him and brief him while driving.

During this time Mrs. Kennedy had a miscarriage and there was a lot of sadness. She was feeling overwhelmed. I don't think she expected the fame. None of us did. Ted was a young Senator from Massachusetts but also the brother of the President and the Attorney General. The light was really shining on her. She was beautiful, lovely, and vulnerable. She did have a drinking problem and we began to recognize it. The Senator and her family tried to help her, but there were other tragic events to unfold.

During the time I worked for him, Joe Kennedy, sr. had a massive stroke. Also Rose Kennedy lost her mother. I think Mrs. Kennedy was in the South of France, when her mother died. There were so many things that happened leading up to the assassination. We wanted very much to have the best Senate staff. He was ridiculed behind his back, I'm sure, by people in Washington who thought he only got there because he was Jack Kennedy's brother.

Heininger: Right.

Robinson: And it hurt him, so he had to be twice as good. We all had to be twice as good, but he really worked his heart out. He wanted to learn; he listened carefully. One story I'll tell you, but it's not in sequence. He had a drink with Senator [James O.] Eastland, who encouraged him to give a speech on civil rights. He returned to the office and I was working late. He said, "Get Milty on the phone. I'm going to give a speech." He had never spoken on the floor of the Senate. I said, "Senator, you're going to give your maiden speech tomorrow?" He said, "No, no. I'm just going to say something about civil rights." I said, "That's not how it goes. The minute you speak, it's going to be—"

Heininger: That's the maiden speech.

Robinson: Right. I couldn't convince him, but who was *I* to tell Ted Kennedy, right? The Senator just felt compelled. It was about 7:00 PM. I called Milton at home and said, "He's on his way to his house. He's going to read to the children and then he's going to be calling you. He wants to give a speech." When they finalized the speech Milton called and dictated it to me. It took all night. I prepared the Senator's speech copy on a manual typewriter with large type. It happened to be President Kennedy's speech typewriter from the 1960 campaign.

Heininger: Wow.

Robinson: That was all we had. Then I made copies for the press. I was told to call Bobby Baker and set the time, which I did. It was scheduled for 9:00 AM on the Senate floor. This was in April of '64, and it was a sad time.

I had called the *Boston Globe*, and some of the other newspapers. I had the reading copy ready. At 5:00 in the morning, I left two copies outside the office for the reporters from the *Boston Globe* and the *Boston Herald Traveler* to pick up. I was nervous because nobody had proofread anything. [*laughing*] We didn't have any e-mail or fax machines. The Senator came in at 8 AM, looked at it, and said okay. He said, "I want to make one call," and called his brother, Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General. Wow, did he get an earful!

Heininger: Really?

Robinson: He said, "What do *you* know about civil rights?"

Heininger: Wow.

Robinson: I could hear it through the phone. I was so shocked, and so concerned. I was taken aback. I thought, *Dear Lord, am I supposed to cancel? What do we do?*

Heininger: How did Ted react?

Robinson: He looked at me. I stepped aside, obviously, I left the room. I thought it was just going to be a 30-second conversation, but it wasn't. He hung up and said, "Let's go," and we went over to the floor.

Heininger: Not dissuaded by his older brother?

Robinson: No, I was happy to see this strength, because I had seen other moments. I won't mention them specifically, but there were times when I felt that he was treated very harshly.

Heininger: He was the baby brother, after all.

Robinson: He was the baby brother and they were trying to guide him.

Heininger: Expectations aren't the same for the baby of the family.

Robinson: No.

Heininger: They really aren't.

Robinson: He didn't expect even to be in this position.

Heininger: No, no, and they didn't.

Robinson: He delivered the speech. I sat in the Senate staff gallery. I cannot remember whether Joan Kennedy was there. She would have sat in the Senate wives gallery. The attendance was sparse.

There were a few surprised reporters. He delivered it beautifully and I ran down and met him coming off the floor. He was excited. A man came up to us and said, "Senator, could I interview you?" I said, "No, thank you." I stepped aside and asked, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm Roger Mudd, from CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System]." He had just started covering the Senate. I said, "We don't do television interviews outside of Massachusetts." He said, "I really would love to talk with him about the speech. Could I talk to him?" I said, "I don't know; let's see." Later I arranged for the Senator to meet Roger Mudd at the office. Roger Mudd, as you probably know, historically, Roger and the Senator were friendly, along with Bobby and Ethel [Kennedy Skakel], because I think he lived in McLean, Virginia.

Heininger: But that's very interesting, because he felt strongly enough about this issue that he wanted to "just say something," which of course was his maiden speech; decided to do it, even

with his brother basically reaming him out for not knowing it and not clearing it; and yet he got off the phone and said, "Let's go."

Robinson: Yes.

Heininger: He went and did it and immediately got national attention, but for substance, not for being a Kennedy.

Robinson: Correct!

[BREAK]

Heininger: This is a resumption of the interview with Terri Haddad Robinson, on July 22, 2009. Go ahead.

Robinson: During the campaign in 1962, we asked the Senator to have a photograph taken that we could use for the brochures and the billboard. In reflecting, Bradford Bachrach was the most famous photographer in America at the time. The Senator had his picture taken and I got the proof. He was so handsome that we couldn't use the photo. It was shocking.

When I worked for him, we would get requests constantly, "How tall is he?" "What does he weigh?" I used to have to keep these statistics in my desk. They would call me also about Mrs. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy's shoe size. He was maybe six feet one and three-quarter inches tall, but we always said six-two; he weighed 190 pounds; and he wore a size 42-long suit. People had to know everything about the family.

Heininger: They badly wanted that detail.

Robinson: Yes. So many magazines wanted to do interviews with him, but he refused. Joan was also very popular because of her youth, beauty, and style. They lived in a large house in Georgetown. They rented it furnished from Captain [Peter] Belin, who owned Evermay, the adjoining estate. It actually was a beautiful home.

The house that Joan Kennedy and Senator Kennedy and their family rented at that time was a double house adjoining Evermay on 28th Street in Georgetown. It recently was renovated and remodeled and sold in the millions. I believe, at the time the rent was $2,500 a month, furnished. I was also involved slightly with the land in McLean, the four acres that he purchased. [John] Carl Warnecke, the architect, designed the house for him and Mrs. Kennedy. That was their home where there were many, many, wonderful, happy occasions, many birthday parties and family parties for the children. It was a beautiful home with pool and tennis court. The Senator loved to entertain.

Senator Kennedy was generous to everybody. He included his family and friends. He took us sailing quite a bit. He loved having people around. It was lovely and the house was a beautiful home. He was very happy to live near Bobby, Ethel, and their children.

After the assassination and after his divorce, there were times I was invited to the house to help. We had mutual friends and my husband and I would be invited for dinner. There was a time, in the '80s I recall, when he felt the house needed some renovating. He called me and asked if I would consider helping. I went through the master bedroom with him and I thought, *Yes, it's time. This man is in a pink and green bedroom*. He needed to have his own identity!

I brought one of the gentlemen who worked in my real estate office. I remember the Senator coming to the office. He looked up at the sign that said, "Robinson Real Estate," and was surprised. I guess he didn't know many women who had their own business. He was taken aback a little bit and said, "Oh, is this what you do?" And I said, "Yes. I don't decorate bedrooms."

It was a pleasure to know his children—I've never heard one parent say that Ted Kennedy wasn't the greatest father. He went to all of the meetings at the school. So many parents have told me over the years, on different occasions—some of them were political, some were nonpolitical—if I ever mentioned I worked for Ted Kennedy, they always brought up the same fact, that he never missed an occasion at the school, a sporting event, and he never missed a meeting with the teachers. He was truly one of the best parents they had at Beauvoir School. I've heard it constantly. Mrs. Kennedy was having many problems and he had to take charge. He had his plate full, trust me. He's just an incredible person, and he took very good care of his family.

Heininger: You said that Joan really enjoyed the campaigning.

Robinson: In the beginning.

Heininger: In the '62 campaign?

Robinson: Yes.

Heininger: When it got to '64, was she doing as much campaigning then?

Robinson: I think the assassination absolutely shocked her, and why not? We were *all* destabilized after that, because we didn't know if they were trying to kill all the Kennedys.

Heininger: Right.

Robinson: I wanted to tell you what happened in 1963, where I was. As a freshman Senator, he would preside over the Senate. President Kennedy wanted the Cape Cod [National] Seashore legislation to be passed, to protect the 100 miles of seashore. Coming from Massachusetts, I was thrilled to be even a small part of it. Senator Saltonstall had a gentleman on his staff named John Jackson, with whom I would be a liaison, with John Culver, who would instruct me to do things regarding the legislation. I would coordinate with Saltonstall's office. The act would protect Cape Cod shoreline, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket from ever being developed. Ted Kennedy wanted to finish what his brother had begun as a Senator.

On November 22, 1963, everyone remembers where they were, and I certainly do. I had a call from Senator Saltonstall's staffer, Mr. Jackson, and John said, "Why don't we have lunch? I want to talk to you about the legislation." We were trying to figure out how to do some promotion on it, so I said, "Okay. The Senator is going over to the floor to preside. After he leaves, we can meet." I remember it being a late lunch. He said, "Let's go to the Carroll Arms Hotel," which was across the street, at the time, from the old Senate Office Building. It no longer exists.

When the Senator left, I went to the hotel dining room, which was very small, to meet John Jackson. It was a treat; I never went out to lunch. We always ate at our desks. I remember it being late, and our lunch had just been delivered. Someone came running in and put a television on the counter of the bar, which was about ten feet away. I saw Walter Cronkite make the announcement that President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. I was so stunned I didn't think I was going to be able to stand up. John Jackson literally had to lift me up. He said, "Terri, you have to go back to the office." I couldn't believe what I was witnessing. We walked back together. I was trying to comprehend what I would find in the office, and then I tried to separate my thoughts, thinking, *Why am I so upset? He will survive. It's not going to affect us, is it?* I couldn't even understand, at that moment, what was about to happen.

He assisted me walk down the Senate corridor, which was a very long, quiet, silent corridor with high ceilings. I remember distinctly thinking, *There's nobody in the corridors.* There was nobody around; it was so silent. I'm sure everybody was listening to the radio. One male was standing in front of the door of Senator Kennedy's office, Bud Rodgers of the *Boston Globe*. He just looked at me and said, "Terri, I'm so sorry." I looked at him and just said, "Buddy?" He said, "I'm just going to be outside if you want me."

I walked in and the reception room had about five people, including Joe McIntyre, the chief of staff. He said to me, "What are we going to do?" I said, "Just lock all the doors." I don't know why and I'm not saying that everyone turned to me, but most of the women did, because I guess they thought I might, through the press, have more knowledge. I never even left the reception room; I just started making a call to Eddie Martin. I called Eddie at the *Boston Traveler*, crying, and I said, "Eddie, is it true?" I don't know why I was even asking the question; I knew it was true. I didn't want to believe it. We were holding on the line with each other and he said to me, "It just came over the wire; he's dead." It was AP's Merriman Smith's wire, I believe. I told the staff.

We started crying. I went into my office, went to my desk, and said, "Where's the Senator?" It all was a blur. He had been presiding at the Senate. He came back to the office. The phones were jammed. I didn't see him. He tried to use the phone, but the lines were all tied up. I was too busy taking calls and trying to figure out what we were supposed to be doing. It was just the worst shock. The Senator went home to use the phone and then I think he drove to the White House. We couldn't get through—all the lines were jammed—so we didn't have any information except a radio.

The next several days are history, [*sighing*] but the size of our office was small. We may have had 14 people, 16. The White House staff had maybe 40 people. The military had to come in and help us. We were trying to put together lists of people who should be invited to the funeral. I

remember working around the clock for three days. The Senator was out of sight; I didn't talk to him. I was getting my instructions mostly from the White House and General [Chester V. Clifton [Jr.]'s office, President Kennedy's military attaché. The White House wanted me to put together a list of President Kennedy's closest friends from Massachusetts in conjunction with the Senator's friends. All of a sudden it became a moment of who would get tickets. That was sensitive.

Heininger: Yes.

Robinson: On the day of the funeral I was at the Senator's home on 28th Street in Georgetown. Their friends from Massachusetts who could not go to the funeral at St. Matthew's Cathedral watched on television in the living room. Joan Kennedy, her sister, and her brother in-law were leaving to go to the church, and I recall her sister did not have a coat, so I gave her my coat. She arrived from Texas and didn't realize how bitterly cold the day was.

We set up some televisions in the living room. People were coming from all over the world, including General [Charles] de Gaulle. I tried to explain to their Massachusetts friends, "I'm so sorry, but you won't be able to go to the church." I gave them all a prayer card. There was a beautiful prayer card given out at St. Matthews Cathedral with the Presidential photo. I remember keeping those prayer cards in my desk. Any time the Senator had someone special visit, he would give them one, but eventually they were all gone.

We all remember that day. We all saw my friend, my Senator, standing there, walking down Pennsylvania Avenue with the cortege. He did what he had to do. We heard the rumors that Bobby was so distraught he couldn't go to his office. After the burial, I went to the office as usual. The next morning at 8:00 AM, Senator Ted Kennedy came into the office. I was so surprised. He looked at me and said, "I want all the newspapers. I want all the magazines. Get me *Paris Match*; they have the best photograph." Whoa! I still have that magazine. I couldn't even look at it; I don't know how he could. The center spread of *Paris Match* had the photograph, at the moment—I don't know whether it was the [Abraham] Zapruder film—but it was very similar to that moment of the bullet striking the President.

It was going to be rough. We all had to help him, and we did. But he showed me strength that I've never seen in another human being. What he had just been through—He had the courage to sit there and read every word. He wanted to know everything. When it passed, many things started changing. I'm sure Joan was getting more depressed. We could feel that Mrs. Kennedy was very upset. He was trying to hold everybody together in his own family. He had to run for reelection in 1964. He didn't have much time to waste. He didn't want sympathy. And then we began trying to understand the impact it had on the world.

The mail started pouring in, and within the first week he said to me, "What are we going to do with all the mail? Could you handle the sympathy mail for me?" I said, "Of course." It meant reading thousands of letters and choosing the ones to give to him every day, for him to read, and answer. I created a card with a black border around it to be mailed as a response. I called Georgetown University and asked for the president of the Young Democrats, and asked, "Do you think you have any volunteers who could come over here and help us?" And they did; they sent me six girls. Those girls were our girls. They came in every day after 5:00 and stayed every

night, reading the mail. We loved every minute of it. We read those letters and within three weeks, all the mail was answered. We were helping "him"!

Heininger: You have to be kidding.

Robinson: I'll never forget some of the letters. One telegram came in and said, "I'm grieved, Marlene." That's all it said. I had to figure out that it was from Marlene Dietrich, sent from Paris. It was very memorable, but those letters are still embedded in my mind. And he would sit there, read them, and respond.

Heininger: Did you get a sense that it made him feel any better?

Robinson: It did, and he answered many of them personally, of course. I would take in the important ones, and he would put his personal notes on many of them. He did it every day. It did make him feel better, definitely. It made me feel better; made us all feel better. We felt we were helping him; we were doing our duty. It got to the point of us thinking, *Gee, look how good we're doing on* our *mail*. Then he got a call from Mrs. Kennedy's office—They were drowning in mail—so the Senator asked me if I'd go over to the White House and meet with them.

Heininger: You had to do Jackie's mail too? Wow!

Robinson: I went over to the White House. We had a meeting and I was trying to explain to them how we organized it, but we were all trying to speed this up. Then—It's just one of those quirky moments. At the second meeting, a man was sitting there, Mr. [Arthur K.] Watson, from IBM [International Business Machines], and he said, "We have a computer. We're going to help you." I said, "What's that?" I didn't know what a computer was. [*laughing*]

Heininger: Nobody did.

Robinson: It was amazing. They figured out how to computerize the mail, to help the White House answer the sympathy mail. That was so fascinating.

After that was done, we returned to our everyday assignments. Christmas was coming and that was going to be a tough time for the Senator. He wanted to have a gift for his family. He called me into the office and said, "Can you get me some manuscript books? I think that would be a nice gift." I said, "I'll find them; don't worry. I'm going to call up Camalier & Buckley; they might have them." In those days, all you had to do was walk in, say you were from Senator Kennedy's office, and you didn't even have to sign the bill, they gave it to you. Of course, they sent the bill later, but everyone wanted to help. "What can we do?" America's heart was broken and everybody knew it. We were so touched because it made others feel so good. "Can we do anything to help?"

Heininger: What was his mood like?

Robinson: He was solemn. He was sad. I'm sure he cried his heart out, but he had to be strong for his children and his wife, his mother, his father. It was very tough.

Heininger: Did you have a sense that he was afraid at any point that this would happen to him?

Robinson: Only later, but not then. It was too much to comprehend. I don't think he thought anyone would harm him at that time, but they really were concerned during the [Earl] Warren Commission [The President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy] and the investigation. He told me he was satisfied with the Warren Commission Report.

Heininger: Did you have a sense that he believed it was Lee [Harvey] Oswald?

Robinson: We all were paranoid at that point. I remember driving up in a cab, coming from my apartment to go to the office during the funeral arrangements. I had had three hours of sleep and I was in front of the Library of Congress. We didn't have cell phones, so when I got to the office they said, "Lee Harvey Oswald was killed." Do you know what? I didn't give a damn. I remember having the strangest feeling: they killed Lee Harvey Oswald in the police station and I couldn't have cared less. Now, in retrospect, when you see it on TV—But at the time I thought, *We were just all so upset about the President.* I'm sure he talked to many people, other Senators, of course. They have ways that I don't know of, of finding out the truth.

I bought manuscript books and he wanted everybody in the family to write their memoirs in them. As I was wrapping them for Christmas to give to him, I said, "Oh, I feel terrible! I made a mistake! One of these has lines." He said, "Give it to Peter Lawford." [*laughing*] I thought that was funny and I looked at him. It was as if to say, *He'll need the lines.*

Heininger: Yes, he'll need the lines.

Robinson: Then they started to cast the Kennedy half dollar at the Treasury. The mint was going to strike the first 100 and give them to Ted Kennedy.

Heininger: Not to Bobby?

Robinson: Maybe Bobby got 100 also. That's interesting.

Heininger: It is interesting.

Robinson: I don't know if they were the first, but they certainly were—They said, "We're giving him the first," meaning the first of—I don't know. Maybe it was because he was the Senator. I'm trying to recall.

Heininger: Bobby wasn't the Senator; he was the Attorney General at that point. That's an interesting question.

Robinson: What year did this come out? [showing the half dollar]

Heininger: Sixty-four, and it doesn't even have a mint on it, either. It doesn't have a "P."

Robinson: Oh, really?

Heininger: No. No "P" or "D."

Robinson: What does that mean?

Heininger: Well, the mint—coins are produced by two mints, and at one point in our history they were produced by three. There was a San Francisco Mint, the Denver Mint, and the Philadelphia Mint. If you look at all the coins now, you see a little P, very teeny-tiny, or a little D, which says it was either minted in Philadelphia or minted in Denver. That has no mint designation on it, which is interesting. I'm assuming it would have been here.

Robinson: Yes, I think it was done here.

Heininger: That's interesting. They said they were going to give him the first 100.

Robinson: I called the Raymond Silver Company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and said, "I want you to create a miniature frame in silver, and I want you to put in the Kennedy blue"—that's what we used to call it; it was a robin's egg blue, but we called it the "Kennedy blue"—"velvet as background." I said, "Then I'm going to send you a message. We'll think of what to put in there. Make me 100 of them and we'll put the insert in later." We were getting so busy, but all of a sudden one day the Senator came to my desk and said, "Oh, that looks pretty, now what about the message? What have you decided?" I felt so bad that I had not finished my job and that he had caught me, the message wasn't ready yet! I always had the inaugural address on the wall next to my desk. I looked at it, and out of nowhere I said, "Wouldn't this be nice? Let's use this, 'Let us go forth to lead the land we love.'" He said, "Oh, that's just perfect." And I thought, *Wow*! He liked it, so that's what we used.

There was one thing that I thought was interesting. I made a list for him. You had to think. You know how the Kennedys talked; they'd say, "Ah, Terri . . ." and you'd have to know exactly what he wanted. He'd never say another word; you'd have to read his mind and that was it; it was done. Okay, I got it. There was no fooling around; you jumped. He said, "I want you to make 100 of these and I want you to put together the names." After a few days, I put together the 100 names and I gave them to him. I was pretty proud of myself; he only struck one name. I thought, *Not bad*. And it was Bill Sutton.

Heininger: Why did he strike his name?

Robinson: I don't know. Bill Sutton had worked for President Kennedy when he was in Congress. He was popular. I don't know. He was a great storyteller, but there must have been something that we just don't know about. I thought it was odd.

Heininger: Maybe he was on Bobby's list?

Robinson: No. I just stood next to him at the desk and it was deliberate. There was a falling out.

Heininger: You had an unusual position in the office. This was much more than doing press.

Robinson: It was just that way. I could take on many tasks.

Heininger: I still can't get over how young you were.

Robinson: I thought about it, because I did not attend college, I really had a jump-start on many people. When these guys, my friends like Paul Kirk, went to college and then law school, I was seven years ahead of them. I learned a lot from them, though, I did.

Then came time to build the Kennedy Center. The Senator was getting involved and Eddie Martin and Barbara Souliotis was putting together an exhibit for the Kennedy Library. They wanted to start a library and needed people to go around the country, and Barbara did that. I helped a little bit on the Kennedy Center.

When they started to build the Kennedy Center, they didn't have enough for the funding, so they asked—Congress was being asked for money, but the Kennedy family, as usual, thought, *Maybe we can help; we'll get some donations.* And he began calling. Whether we called them or they called us, I'm not sure how it began, but I was placing calls for the Senator to people like the President of Italy, who sent all the marble; to Ireland, which sent the Waterford chandeliers.

Heininger: Oh, my God. You were placing these calls?

Robinson: Yes, yes, it was fun.

Heininger: That would be fun.

Robinson: Yes, it was nice. I could have called [Gabrielle "Coco"] Chanel, but I didn't.

Heininger: Gee, there could have been Chanel in all the bathrooms.

Robinson: They never got over it. Thirty years later I met a man who was in the military, and somehow it came up, what he did. I was at a dinner and he said, "I stored all this marble for the Kennedy Center." I couldn't believe it. I said, "What?" and told him my part of the story. He said, "Yes, when they shipped it over, we kept it for several years, in this warehouse. I put it there. The marble came from Italy." Wasn't that an amazing story?

Heininger: Somebody had to keep it. It wasn't ready to be built.

Robinson: It wasn't.

Heininger: Wow.

Robinson: I know. You find out many little things like that. Washington, as you said earlier, is a small town.

Heininger: Yes.

Robinson: But I was so touched that people wanted to do that. That's what I mean. There was so much good that came out of this and so many people who wanted to help. Ted Kennedy was the little brother, but he really was a giant. He always tried to do the right thing. I know people who read about him have said things about him. I've seen him in many circumstances. I've seen many people in the same circumstances; he's human.

My family and I would go to Aspen for Christmas skiing and he'd be out there with his family. We'd see him sometimes at New Year's Eve parties, with the children, and with my children. We had a good time; it was fun and, yes, there were times that he drank, of course. The man had a broken heart. He didn't have many things going his way. At the end of the day he had a wife who 13 times, I was told, went to rehab; he couldn't help her. He tried. He had a boy with cancer; his daughter now, a survivor of lung cancer; and also Patrick. There were just so many hardships and heartbreaks.

I helped Patrick find a place to live when he was elected to Congress. I thought it was so telling that there was nobody there for him. He called me up and I found him a rental. We bought the furniture and moved him in, in a couple of days. I was thinking, *Who's there to help this kid?* You know? He wasn't a kid, but those are the things that your mother does for you.

That night, I saw Joan at the swearing-in. [Newton] Gingrich decided that everybody should work until midnight, so the newcomers missed their own swearing-in parties. I was with Joan over at Senator [Claiborne] Pell's house in Georgetown. She was supposed to stand and shake hands as everyone came in. She saw me and said, "Terri Haddad!"—She always called me "Terri Haddad" and I loved it—"Stay here with me." I knew what she meant, so I stood with her in that reception hall as people came in. Pell lived in a classic historic house in Georgetown. The entry foyer must have been 30 feet long, and because it was so long, at the back of the hall they put the bar, and Joan and I had to stand in front of the bar. I remember thinking how uncomfortable this was.

Heininger: Yes.

Robinson: She had to stand there, to greet the people, and behind her was the bartender. I thought, *Dear Lord, how did we get to this?* But she was gracious. It was just such a sad story.

But there were many happy times. I just happened to be talking about'62, '63, and '64. It was tough. We had great, great times but then the assassination and the plane crash.