



## EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### INTERVIEW WITH PATTI B. SARIS

September 25, 2007  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Interviewer**  
Janet Heining

© 2013 The Miller Center Foundation and the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate

Publicly released transcripts of the Edward M. Kennedy Oral History Project are freely available for noncommercial use according to the Fair Use provisions of the United States Copyright Code and International Copyright Law. Advance written permission is required for reproduction, redistribution, and extensive quotation or excerpting. Permission requests should be made to the Miller Center, P.O. Box 400406, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4406.

To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], Edward M. Kennedy Oral History Project, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PATTI B. SARIS

September 25, 2007

**Heininger:** This is an interview with Judge Patti Saris on September 25, 2007. Let's start at the beginning. Tell me when you first met Edward Kennedy. What were your initial impressions of him?

**Saris:** Let me start from the very beginning.

**Heininger:** The very beginning is good.

**Saris:** I am a Boston kid. I grew up here, went to the Boston public schools, and my first interaction with Senator Kennedy was when he sent me a letter when I was 12 or 13 years old congratulating me for getting into Girls Latin School. He was a brand new Senator, and he sent me a letter, which I was convinced he signed himself.

**Heininger:** Who knows? He might have.

**Saris:** He might have way back then. It was the first time that I personally started thinking about Senator Kennedy. I went to Latin School, and then I went through college and law school here in the Boston area. I was in a law firm in Boston right after the civil rights years and the Watergate years. This was about 1976, 1977, and I didn't love being in a law firm. I wanted more than that in life. I was working on some interesting commercial litigation, but I aspired for more. I wanted to make a difference in the world. I had come from that generation of college kids and law school kids.

I got a phone call just as I was working on a commercial brief, and a friend of mine from law school called me up and said, "Senator Kennedy has just become chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Do you have any interest in applying?" Now, that was something like a fairy godmother coming to me. I knew nothing about Washington, D.C., other than my parents had once taken me there for a weekend. How could I possibly compete with the young men and women who were so much more knowledgeable than I was about the rules of the Senate or about the Hill?

I remember going down there to interview the man, whom I had only seen on TV. I walked in and I had the interview. He looked at my résumé, and he said, "You went to Girls Latin School? My dad went to Boston Latin School. Anyone who went to Latin School is smart enough to do this job," and he offered me the job. So that was my exciting first entrée to the Hill. I was one of the few Boston people on the staff. While you had mentioned before we turned on the tape

recorder that there weren't that many women, there weren't that many Boston townies either. I felt so proud to go down there, having spent my life here hearing about him, and to work for him. So that was my first meeting with him.

**Heininger:** Who contacted you? Was it somebody who worked on the staff at the time?

**Saris:** There was a guy named Jay Urwitz, who worked, I think, on health care issues. I also had known Doris Goodwin from Harvard College, and so the combination of the two, they encouraged me to apply, and I got the job.

**Heininger:** And Girls Latin sealed the deal.

**Saris:** Girls Latin sealed the deal.

**Heininger:** What were your first impressions of Kennedy when you started to work for him?

**Saris:** The truth is, I was so low down on the hierarchy at that point. I was maybe 28 years old, it was the end of 1978, and I was a beginning staffer. Tommy Susman is the guy who technically hired me, although I worked for David Boies, who was the chief counsel at the time. He had just come in.

My immediate supervisor was one of the only other women in the place, a woman named Irene Emsellem. Irene was one of the few people on the Judiciary Committee who was not an attorney, and she probably gave me the wisest words of advice I've ever had on a job or in life. She said to me, "You will never deal with the politics of this office. You're from Boston. You don't know the Hill. You're probably not tough enough to handle the infighting of this office. I advise you to take the subject area and the legislation that they give you and know it better than anybody else, and that's how you will survive here."

They were great words of advice, because I was immediately assigned, by David Boies, to government regulation. You have to understand that when I went down there, I had great images of the Watergate Committee, civil rights, civil liberties. David saw my face suddenly drop, and I said, "I was hoping for constitutional rights or something." He said, "I guarantee you, these are the issues of 1978, 1979, and 1980—the issues of deregulation, of too much government regulation, of the impact of regulation on small business. If you know this area, you will know Washington, and you will understand the agenda for the next Presidential campaign or the next Congress."

He was absolutely right. I worked very hard on the burdens of regulation, changing them so that they were less burdensome. At the time, John Culver was there. He was sponsoring legislation to reduce regulatory burdens. The labor unions and the consumer groups were worried that the health and safety regulation would be wiped out in this drive, so they were lobbying to make sure that environmental regulation, consumer regulation, and the like stayed intact. It was quite controversial. It started sweeping in patent reform and issues of government innovation, and of course, on the plate were airline deregulation, trucking deregulation, banking deregulation. I'm sure there were others I'm forgetting.

Kennedy, because of Stephen Breyer, was one of the leading forces in airline deregulation and trucking deregulation—a little less so, let's say, in banking deregulation. But he also had strong commitments, as you can imagine, to the labor and consumer groups. He didn't want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. He wanted to reform economic regulation but preserve health and safety, and that was pretty much the mandate in my area.

David Boies left after about a year. David's main interest was antitrust. Steve Breyer came in, and his main issue was regulation. If you haven't had a chance to talk to Justice Breyer, he was very much one of the driving forces of the agenda for the Judiciary Committee during that time period.

**Heininger:** He came in after you had been there?

**Saris:** Yes, after about a year, at the tail end of '79, although I'm sure there's an archive that says exactly when he joined the staff.

**Heininger:** Yes, and we have it someplace. I just don't know it off the top of my head.

**Saris:** David Boies was chief counsel to Judiciary for a year, and then Stephen Breyer came in.

**Heininger:** Give me the timeline, because I remember all this happening, but I don't remember the exact timeframe for it. Airline deregulation started in the late '70s, and when was it actually completed?

**Saris:** I don't remember the exact date.

**Heininger:** It takes a while.

**Saris:** By the Presidential campaign in 1980, I believe that both trucking and airline deregulation had been implemented. I have some memory that airline deregulation was pretty much through the Congress by the time I arrived, and trucking deregulation was on the front burner as the next area that needed reform. I remember that there was a lot of—when you talk about the lack of transparency in the Congress—infighting over who got primary jurisdiction over that. Was it Judiciary, with its jurisdiction over antitrust and competition, or was it Commerce? I believe that both committees were asserting some jurisdiction over that bill. It quickly became, though, about more than just economic regulation and deregulation. At the time, Senator Kennedy was increasingly interested in a Presidential campaign. Both [Jimmy] Carter and Kennedy were interested in it. So it also became part of the Presidential politics, if you will, as to who was going to be the leader in this effort.

**Heininger:** Who was on the Judiciary Committee while you were there, and what was the division of responsibility?

**Saris:** First of all, the staff was huge. I'm going to ballpark it at 80.

**Heininger:** Wow.

**Saris:** That number would include both professional and support staff, but the committee staff was large. When I came, the chief counsel was David Boies. Tommy Susman had a role, and I can't remember his exact title, but he had been chief counsel to the subcommittee, on administrative law, before Kennedy became chair. So Tommy Susman had one of the big roles there. Ken Feinberg, who was the author of the Criminal Code Reform, was also on Judiciary.

**Heininger:** He was there the whole time that you were there?

**Saris:** No, he left at some point, but he was there for most of the time that I was there. He straddled the main office and the Judiciary Committee so that he sat sometimes with one and sometimes with another. I'll get to that in a minute. Then there was Irene Emsellem, who had somewhat of a supervisory role, although she wasn't as close to Kennedy. She hadn't been with him for long. She had come more recently, as the staff was building up. They were also trying to get more people from more diverse backgrounds, so I was from Boston. I was female, obviously.

Then there was a great woman, Antonia Hernandez, who became one of my close friends there, who then became head of the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund after she left. She was primarily involved in the immigration reform, which Kennedy feels very close to. There were criminal code issues, which were handled by Feinberg. There was antitrust, which was primarily handled by Boies and Breyer. Patent reform was not primarily within Kennedy's bailiwick. I think he cared about government regulation not being anticompetitive, but patent reform was not at the top of his agenda, as far as I could tell. He wanted to reform it and to make sure that it promoted innovation, but his key issues were criminal code regulation and immigration. Occasionally a constitutional issue would come up—for example, freedom of the press or something like that.

Finally, you can't minimize the fact that in 1979 and 1980, there were a lot of judicial appointments. We would have to do some legal research on it, but around that time, there was an omnibus judgeship bill that created multiple new judgeships. Some of them were in Massachusetts, and they were all around the country as well. President Carter had a huge impact on the courts. A major function of the Judiciary Committee—literally I think three people were dedicated just to this function—was to process people in order to get them on the bench. At the top of the heap during my time was Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who came through after the elections, when President [Ronald] Reagan was there. She was noncontroversial. People forget that there was an enormous number of federal district court judges and appellate judges who needed to get on the bench, and so a big piece of the committee's job was to make sure that that happened in a responsible way.

The other piece of the Judiciary Committee situation was that everyone was excited because they thought that Kennedy was going to be elected President. People started joking that it was the shadow Presidency. You've got to understand, back in those days, Washington was so different on a couple of fronts from what it is now. We were pretty friendly with the people in the Carter administration. It got tense when the campaigns heated up, but literally I would drive my car up the driveway at the White House. We would park in the parking lot and go meet people in the White House—none of this high security, can't go near the White House thing. We were very friendly with them, at least in the beginning, and then with us as we tried to get through, for example, the judicial nominees or some of the regulation legislation. It was only later, as the

campaigns heated up, that there was some tension. At some point, people started thinking in terms of a Presidential campaign, and that's when the dynamics started changing.

**Heininger:** How did that affect what you did?

**Saris:** At my level, remember, I was 28. I was a baby, now that I look back at it from the ripe age of 56. In the beginning, the Presidential issue didn't affect me much, except that I suddenly had more clout than I ever thought I would have as a young staffer on the Hill.

**Heininger:** That's a big effect.

**Saris:** Suddenly the question became, what did Senator Kennedy want? He was always a powerful person, but now he became a potential Presidential candidate. I was, of course, on the staff of the chair of the committee, so I was able to have a fairly big impact on the way legislation looked. I remember some very heady experiences, such as being on the floor of the Senate, negotiating the way an amendment would look on paper—for example, the Paperwork Control Act of 1980 or the Regulatory Flexibility Act of whatever. During those years, there were more minor, but still important, things that passed, such as Martin Luther King Day—things that are symbolic but in an important way. So on that level, it affected me.

In terms of the culture of the office, however, that's when it started getting very intense and internally competitive in ways that I had not seen before. I was young, but it was getting harder and harder to have access to Senator Kennedy. There was a dynamic of who would be in the briefing room with the Senator? Who would be invited out to his house in McLean for the briefings? Were you important enough to get time with him to brief him? So as the Presidential campaign heated up, the jockeying to get close to him became more intense, and Rick Burke became the gatekeeper. Rick was a very young person. Have you heard that story?

**Heininger:** Pieces of it. You're the first person I've interviewed who was a witness to it, and it's an important piece of the story because it affects that whole time period.

**Saris:** I'm not sure I know it all. But at that point, the pre-Presidential campaign, we didn't know any of it. Rick was an important person in the office because he controlled access to Kennedy. It got to the point where the Presidential campaign staff opened an office, and the question was who was going to go from the Senate staff over to the Presidential campaign? Once again, that became intensely competitive.

My personal story in this is quite interesting; that is, I was one of the only people who was not asked to go. One by one, people were asked to go over there, and one by one, each desk would be vacated and the chair would be empty. At some point, I remember saying, "Did I do something to offend someone?" Somebody said to me, "Don't you feel like the train has left the station and that you're here by yourself?" Finally, I think Steve Breyer said, "Don't you understand that if you stay here, you'll be one of the people who will be in charge of the legislative agenda if he goes out on the campaign trail?" That's essentially what happened.

I was one of the few people left, so I grew as a legislative assistant in a way that I couldn't as the lowest person on the totem pole. I had a lot more responsibility for legislation, and not just in my narrow area. The nature of the office changed, the tempo, because he was out on the campaign

trail. At that point, obviously there were people who headed the campaign, things became more political, and he was gone a lot. You've probably interviewed people on the Presidential campaign. I was one of those left behind.

**Heininger:** Was there a lot of jockeying at this time between Rick Burke and Larry Horowitz?

**Saris:** Larry was on the Health Care Committee.

**Heininger:** But he succeeded Rick as the AA [administrative assistant].

**Saris:** Right. Larry was a strong presence in the office. Though he was not the AA while Rick was there, he was definitely—at least according to my perception—a counterweight, a strong presence, another avenue into the office. He had his own lines of access to the Senator. So there was some jockeying there. Larry was always kind to me. My father happened to have died in that time period, and Larry was a doctor, and I had a great relationship with him. I think he was viewed as one of the power centers in that office. I can't remember whether he went over to the campaign or whether he stayed on the Senate staff, but I have some memory that he was on the campaign.

**Heininger:** He had a lot to do with the campaign, but I don't remember where his paycheck came from at that point.

**Saris:** There was a big campaign headquarters near Blackie's Restaurant. It was on another side of town. I don't remember where he physically was located, but Larry Horowitz was an important player.

**Heininger:** How did Carey Parker fit into this?

**Saris:** He's the most understated, modest person I've ever met. For a while, I wasn't even sure he liked me, but I then realized that yes, he did. He just sat in his office and worked. Because he had no agenda of his own other than Kennedy's—at least none that I'd ever seen—I think he was the most trusted of advisors. He never played the power game—who got access, who didn't—or if he did, it was so subtle that I didn't see it. I saw it with other people.

**Heininger:** I'm not sure he ever needed to.

**Saris:** I don't think he needed to. He's so trusted. He's so knowledgeable and smart. He's still there, to my knowledge.

**Heininger:** He's still there.

**Saris:** My daughter worked as an intern for the Education Subcommittee last summer, and she told me that he's still there. She introduced herself. I mean, now he's seeing children of staff people come through. *[laughter]* It must be amazing to him.

In any event, there I was in the office. They were out on the campaign trail, but I felt dramatically as if I wanted to help with the campaign and not just work on the legislative agenda. So I took some vacation time, and I went out on the campaign trail. That picture right there,

which I thought I would show you, is a picture of a steamboat along a river. You probably wouldn't recognize where that was, but that's in Keokuk, Iowa, where I took three weeks off.

**Heininger:** I grew up in Missouri.

**Saris:** Do you know where Keokuk is?

**Heininger:** Yes.

**Saris:** Right where Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa meet. I left. I worked from Christmas vacation through, I think, whenever the caucuses were. It must have been the end of January. I took an unpaid vacation and went out there and was on the campaign trail. I handed out leaflets at 6:00 in the morning, and I lived with a family who had two pictures in their house. One was Jesus Christ, and on an equal level was Jack Kennedy. It said everything to me. I lived in their home, and they were really poor, with two mentally handicapped children. The husband had died of a heart attack, and they had no health care, and they made sure I had roast beef once a week. The family made a huge effort for me. The son had been in Vietnam. I was out there working for the Senator for about three weeks, and it gave me a sense of the campaign trail and of how tough the odds were.

By the way, that was Lee County, and we split it 50/50 with President Carter. So we did okay in Lee County, which was where the rubber workers were. You probably remember, there's a bit of an industrial base, not just rural, there. At the end of the day, while there was a huge number of people who were completely committed to the Kennedy family and its vision, but he couldn't get over the issues of his past.

**Heininger:** Did you experience that when you were talking to people about him?

**Saris:** Somewhat.

**Heininger:** Did they raise Chappaquiddick often?

**Saris:** They did. It's a shame, because he's probably one of the best Senators, and I'm sure he would have been one of the best Presidents, but I heard that. Yet many of the people who still had that question were voting for him and they went out to the caucuses to vote for him, but of course I only saw his supporters. There must have been enough people, at least on the Democratic side, who had questions, and that may have been one of the questions.

**Heininger:** I know you spent time in New Hampshire and New Jersey during the campaign. Did you get the same impression about his chances when you were in those states?

**Saris:** I was embedded, to use the vocabulary of the day, in a family in Iowa, and they introduced me to so many people. The people were so welcoming. They treated me like family. I think they may have felt emboldened to ask me some questions that they might not have asked somebody else. I tried to talk to them as much as I could about how much I respected and liked Kennedy, and I think that was an important part of my being there. We did really well in Keokuk, but when I was in New Jersey and New Hampshire, I was part of a campaign staff that was handing out pamphlets or standing at a factory plant gate or walking around a shopping



center. In Keokuk, I got to know the people. I don't know that I had any impact at all when I went to the other states.

**Heininger:** So in that sense, you were much more insulated from what people's views were in the other two states than you were in Iowa.

**Saris:** I was. Besides, I'd used up most of my time. Truthfully it was maybe a week in Paramus, New Jersey, and a week in Manchester, New Hampshire. I was there, but I did not have the same closeness to those communities that I had in Iowa. I loved where I was in Iowa, and I think I made a big difference. But I couldn't continue to do that in other states. I was primarily on the Senate staff, and I was working without pay, and I went back to the Senate staff.

**Heininger:** Why do you think you weren't asked to join the campaign staff, when you felt like everybody else was? Was it your age?

**Saris:** What I like to think is that I was trusted professionally and that I was able to handle the Judiciary Committee legislative agenda, and some work from the front office too, while Kennedy was away. It turns out that when he didn't win, my knowledge and expertise came in handy. You may remember that, at some point, the Senate switched.

**Heininger:** Yes.

**Saris:** In 1980.

**Heininger:** There weren't anywhere near the number of jobs available for people to return to.

**Saris:** Eighty jobs on the Judiciary Committee dropped to about 15 when we became the minority. Then when Kennedy switched from being the chair of Judiciary to ranking—

**Heininger:** The Labor Committee.

**Saris:** —in the Labor Committee, we dropped to three staff members, just to give you a sense of what happened to that office. I'm sure you can get exact numbers.

**Heininger:** Who was left? You had stayed.

**Saris:** I stayed. They asked me to stay.

**Heininger:** You made it through to the 15.

**Saris:** I made it through to the three.

**Heininger:** Not a bad decision. Not a bad way for it to have worked out.

**Saris:** I often tell my law clerks and others that I was so disappointed—because of course I wanted to be there fighting for my guy, for whom I cared so much—but the truth is that it turned out for the best. I became incredibly knowledgeable about the Senate. I mastered, at that point anyway, a far broader area of his legislative agenda than I had been asked to specialize in.

When it was all over, the Democrats became the minority in the Senate. I felt as if I could really serve the Senate and him. At that point, I knew a fair amount about procedure, about the substance, and I was one of the ones who were asked to stay. So I tell my law clerks, what looks the grimmest in the beginning turns out sometimes to be a blessing. That was when I really got to know the Senator, not when I was one of a gazillion people on a huge Judiciary Committee staff, not when I was the new kid on the block.

It's interesting how it turned out. I worked for him for about another year. He couldn't have been more wonderful to me. Now I was almost always in the morning briefings and the key meetings, if you will. I stayed while we were in the minority status, and eventually decided to return to Boston. I was married. I decided to have a family, and this is my home. I always planned to return here. So I was able to see the Senate when the Democrats were in the majority and also when they were in the minority. At some point, I wrote a book about the Congress with Abner Mikva, partly from the expertise that I developed during that time. I'm sure that it was partly a result of that experience, of getting close to him, and of really watching him as the great Senator that informed my beliefs about what an important role he has played in American history. Because I got to see him afterward.

**Heininger:** Who was left when the staff went down to the three?

**Saris:** At some point, I was moved into his front office, though I can't remember exactly when that happened.

**Heininger:** Jerry Tinker was still there, wasn't he?

**Saris:** Jerry Tinker did immigration.

**Heininger:** Yes. Then there was you, and then who else was left?

**Saris:** I'm trying to remember.

**Heininger:** I don't remember who else was still there.

**Saris:** It was almost no one. At some point, I worked in the front office, and I started doing everything from dairy legislation to judiciary work to the Energy Mobilization Board and dealing with the energy crisis. I basically became a front-office person. I did some Massachusetts stuff. I became a jack of all trades. Jerry focused on immigration. I'm not sure I remember who else was left. For a while, he was going to appoint—someone who died, as chief counsel to Judiciary. The one who died in the plane crash.

**Heininger:** The one whose name I can't remember right now.

**Saris:** Who Kennedy was close to and who was on the campaign trail with him. He was going to be chief counsel to Judiciary when Judiciary was minority status. Then when Kennedy decided to go over to Health, he decided not to stay. So that position wasn't filled. There may have been one secretary and Jerry Tinker and for a while me, and then I came into the front office. It was tiny. Kennedy dramatically reduced his role on Judiciary. He put all his focus into health, labor, and education issues.

**Heininger:** But in so doing, it both expanded the scope of what you were able to do and also increased your access to him.

**Saris:** Right.

**Heininger:** In some ways, not a bad tradeoff for you.

**Saris:** No, although at the time, everyone was so devastated.

**Heininger:** Was he?

**Saris:** I wasn't close enough to him to know on a personal level how he took the defeat for the Presidency. Ironically he became stronger the more he campaigned. Some of his best speeches—for example, the so-called Georgetown speech—were some of his strongest moments, as opposed to the Roger Mudd interview.

**Heininger:** Yes.

**Saris:** That was a disaster. It's just unfortunate, because those kinds of things stick in the beginning, and it was hard for him to shake them. So I don't know at what level he took the defeat for the Presidency. On the Senate level, though, you began to see the so-called liberal lion, and in some ways I thought it came out more in a minority status than otherwise.

First of all, they were just dark days. I mean, almost everyone I knew got fired, and it was not just on the Senate side. It was also all of Culver's staff, who lost his election, and basically most of my friends were without jobs, just putting it at this most basic level. They were desperate to get into law firms or to find other kinds of jobs. Many of them were unemployed. Many of them left the city. I had many friends in the Carter administration. They were all gone. The city—as well as people my age who were in their late twenties, early thirties—was in chaos, and it was a pretty gloomy place to be. Yet, from the ashes, if you will, you started seeing Kennedy as a strong voice that people were turning to, to represent those values that had been lost.

**Heininger:** Do you think he felt liberated in any way by not having to run, which allowed him to focus his efforts on the Senate?

**Saris:** I don't know. It's a good question, because if he became discouraged, as far as being a Senate leader, I didn't see it. He was, and probably still is, a workaholic. He would start with briefings at 7:00 or 7:30 in the morning. Remember, in the beginning, I wasn't invited to those. By the end, I was. So I would see them. He would just be getting up in the morning. You drive out there. You put stuff in his bag. You'd throw memos, no longer than two pages, single-spaced. They had to be brief. But there were tons of them. He must have read them at night. But generally you'd get there at 7:00 in the morning. He would have read what you gave him, because you'd see the marked-up version. He'd ask a few questions. Some of the issues I covered—some of the issues of government regulation or whatever—frankly, I knew he was bored with, but he had always read about them nonetheless.

I got to the point where I was writing some of the speeches. He'd have some changes in the speeches. You'd go to an event, he'd give a speech, and then—because even though we had

shrunk in size and staff, he still had a Senate staff—he'd go off and do what every other staff member needed done. Then you'd see on his schedule that he had this or that fundraiser or a speaking engagement in the evening, and he frequently wouldn't get home until 10:00 or 11:00. He wasn't married at the time.

**Heininger:** Right.

**Saris:** He did have a young child who was sometimes there, Patrick [Kennedy]. Some people would help out with Patrick in the home. But it was constant, his commitment to his Senate job. Whether he looked back, I don't know, but he was looking forward, and he quickly became one of the leading voices on the floor in a minority status.

**Heininger:** What was it like being one of the few women working on the staff?

**Saris:** There weren't as few as you would think. On Judiciary, I remember that the number rapidly increased. There was a woman named Susan McDermott, who had handled airline deregulation and who did some of the judicial nominations. Antonia Hernandez was brand new too. I named my daughter Marisa, and she named her daughter Marisa, and I was Marisa of the East and her of the West. We became very close friends. Irene wasn't there on the campaign all the way through. But while I was there, there were the four of us, so it didn't feel so lonely. It is true that at the top levels on Judiciary, it was all male, and it is also true that in the front office—I'm thinking out loud. Mary Jeka was there briefly, but she was mostly out of the Boston office.

**Heininger:** Right.

**Saris:** In the front office, of the key players, there weren't any women. That had not *really* changed. But at the time, the leadership was not female. Yet, was I lonely? Not really, because I had Antonia, and I had Susan McDermott, with whom I was very close, and Irene was always a mentor to me. By the time the Senate had flipped and I was there by myself, they were all gone. At that point, I had reached a comfort zone with the Senator, with Carey Parker. I was part of the team, so I didn't feel excluded.

**Heininger:** Tell me about Larry, because I have to interview Larry next month. It's hard to figure out all that Larry did.

**Saris:** First of all, I didn't know him very well. My relationship with him was fine, but I was not supervised by him. By reputation, he could sometimes be hard to work with.

**Heininger:** Everybody says that.

**Saris:** The only thing I can say of kindness about Larry is that at one point my father was dying, and I was being a terrible daughter because I wouldn't believe it, and I wouldn't go home. He was very young when he died. Larry got on the phone to the Mass General Hospital—I'll never forget it—because he was worried. I kept saying, "Larry, does it sound bad?" and he came to me and said, "Your father is very sick." Then Kennedy said, "Get on that plane." My dad died the following week. It was a very kind but firm way that Larry dealt with me—as a doctor—at that moment. I often wondered whether that was what bonded him to the Senator, because he also had a role with the Senator's son.

**Heininger:** Right.

**Saris:** When he had the doctor hat on, he was fabulous.

**Heininger:** Probably, yes.

**Saris:** I didn't actually work for him. I had a fabulous time working with both David Boies and Stephen Breyer. They couldn't have been greater. I loved Tommy Susman. People were good to me on Judiciary, and they basically buffered me a bit from what I would call the "front office politics," which were pretty rough.

**Heininger:** Well, Senate politics are pretty rough, or they can be very rough. What were the other issues? What about the gay rights issue? How much of an issue was this when you were there?

**Saris:** I'm glad you brought up the gay rights issue. I was a pretty sheltered Boston kid. Let's start there. Having gone to the Girls Latin School, I can safely say that if I knew someone who was gay while I was growing up, I didn't know it. It just wasn't the topic of conversation in my house. It wasn't a topic of conversation at my school. I went to Harvard. It frankly wasn't a topic of conversation there. It wasn't on my radar screen. I had no feelings about it at all. The first gay person I ever met was Jay Steptoe. Do you know who he is?

**Heininger:** Yes.

**Saris:** Literally, the first person I knew who was openly gay. He was at the next desk over. We didn't have offices.

**Heininger:** Right.

**Saris:** Jay and I became very friendly. He was an openly gay man at a time, in the late '70s, when that wasn't so common or accepted. In some ways, he was a pioneer in that office. I think that's an important statement, number one. He had a boyfriend, I remember, Joe. I remember everyone was talking about it openly, and it was the first time, in an open way, that people were pretty cool about it.

About the issue. There was no real movement toward gay rights in that office, in terms of civil rights legislation. I don't remember if anything had even been introduced. The Equal Rights Amendment for women was very much a prominent thing, and people were very much involved with trying to reform the Fair Housing Act. Remember when Steve Breyer came through? That was part of the agenda: civil rights, voting rights, housing rights, women's rights, immigration rights—but not gay rights. It wasn't a really important part of our agenda.

I remember that the first time it came up was as part of the campaign. The various gay rights groups wanted Kennedy to support various things, and I frankly think the issue was probably new to him. It met with some skepticism with some of the front-office people. But I think Kennedy wanted to know more about it. So, being the junior kid on the block, I was assigned gay rights, which interested me. I remember that I went to a meeting at Sargent Shriver's house, and there were some people there. I don't remember exactly who else was there, but I think there was

a priest. We were talking about what role the Senator should have in these issues. Once again, they were not in the forefront of the campaign. I don't think they were in the forefront of anyone's campaign.

**Heininger:** Not in '80.

**Saris:** I don't remember that being a key issue for the platform committees. I just don't remember it. But it was the beginning of an awareness. That's all I can say about it. People were starting to talk about it, and not in a pejorative, making-fun-of-gay-people way, but in a serious way, "All right, this is a new issue for us. What do we think about it?" At least with respect to Kennedy, it was met with openness, and it came up first in the context of the campaign. It was, to my knowledge at that time—and I could be wrong in my memory—not something that we looked at seriously in terms of legislation. I just don't remember it.

**Heininger:** But then it explodes on the scene with the evolution of the AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] crisis, which pretty much arises the following year.

**Saris:** That's right. Pretty much. But the beginning of it was that Presidential campaign, with the gay rights groups beginning to ask for more, where Jay was openly gay in the office. It was the beginning of my thinking about it, and of the Senator's thinking about it. You'd have to ask him, but that's what it seemed like. It was very preliminary but not closed down. It was, "What are we going to do here?"

**Heininger:** It's an interesting issue because, as you say, it was not really on anybody's agenda in terms of politics until then. Then, all of a sudden, the AIDS crisis explodes, and you get Kennedy very far out in front in a leadership role on it. In trying to track back, where did that come from? Where did the openness to something that was immediately labeled as, "This is a disease that happens only to gay people," get turned into, "This is a public health problem, not a moral stigma disease"?

**Saris:** That's a great question. As it arose on the campaign, it was a civil rights issue, not a health issue.

**Heininger:** Right.

**Saris:** If there are equal rights for women, should there be equal rights for gays? I seem to remember that someone was proposing legislation somewhere. I'm sure that legislative research could reveal that, but in the beginning with us, it came up because various gay rights groups wanted him to support their rights. I don't believe it came up in the context of AIDS, and I'm pretty sure we weren't holding hearings on it.

**Heininger:** But starting out from the position of gay rights being a matter of equal rights is very different from attaching to homosexuality the moral stigma that so many people associated it with once AIDS arose.

**Saris:** That's a good point.

**Heininger:** That's simply what we've picked up in talking to other people about it.

**Saris:** So their memory was the same as mine. It would be wonderful for you to talk to Jay Steptoe, who is still there. He's the general counsel of NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] now.

**Heininger:** I'll put him on the list.

**Saris:** You have probably too many people to talk to.

**Heininger:** Unbelievable how many.

**Saris:** Out of the blue, I just got an e-mail from Jay Steptoe. We had actually been over to his house. I think he's since broken up with the guy he was with, but he was openly gay in the office. I believe he was probably the first openly gay guy. It would be interesting for him to tell you his memories.

**Heininger:** What were his responsibilities?

**Saris:** Trucking deregulation.

**Heininger:** Why did you leave?

**Saris:** I left in about 1981, probably at the tail end. Boston is still my home. My dad had died, my mom was alone, I was married, and I had not yet had children. I have since had four children in rapid succession. I came back here, and I wanted to have a family. I had my first daughter in 1983, so it must mean that I got pregnant in '82. This is something I still share with the Senator: when all is said and done, this is my home, not Washington, and I thought it was a good time to come back.

**Heininger:** Did you have a job to come back to?

**Saris:** I worked very briefly for a small law firm, and I felt a huge withdrawal from working for Kennedy, where (a) he treated me fabulously and (b) I just loved the Senate. I loved it. I loved watching him in it. I loved playing a role in it. It felt like you could make a difference in the world, and it was very hard for me to go to a small firm. I quickly left that firm, and I went to work for the U.S. Attorney's Office here in Boston.

I worked for Bill Weld, a Republican obviously. I'll never forget Bill Weld saying to me, "Why would someone who just came from working for Ted Kennedy want to work here?" He laughed and he said, "Well, he hires great people. I don't care if you're a Democrat or a Republican, as long as you are a good worker and smart." So Weld hired me, and I worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office, and I eventually became a magistrate judge and went over to the Superior Court of Massachusetts. I was a [Michael] Dukakis appointment for the state courts for five years. Then when [William] Clinton came in and there were openings here, I applied, and the Senator played a key role in that.

**Heininger:** What did he do for you?

**Saris:** If I understand it correctly, I think he had a big role with Clinton in putting together the Merit Selection Commission. I went through that process, and I became a finalist. I was one of the five people picked. I believe that President Clinton deferred a lot to what Senator Kennedy and Senator [John] Kerry wanted, because obviously they were Senators from the same party. There were five vacancies because, believe it or not—I couldn't figure this out—President [George H.W.] Bush, the father, had left five vacancies open basically. Hadn't gotten around to it. People ask, "How do you become a federal judge?" I say, "That's sheer serendipity, because if Bush had filled them—" There have been no openings since. Bush eventually nominated five people, but he did it too late to finish the entire process. One woman judge on the superior court never got the job, and every time I look at her, I feel almost guilty because she would have had my job.

Anyway, it worked out. The openings were there. President Clinton came in. The five people who came on at about the same time as me were Rick Stearns, who worked for Senator Kennedy on the Presidential campaign and was Bill Clinton's roommate at Oxford. He'd be an interesting person to talk to. He was also George McGovern's campaign manager. There's a guy name Reginald Lindsay, who was an African American, who had been Dukakis' director of public utilities and a leader in the Bar. He's also handicapped and is in a wheelchair. Myself. There was a woman named Nancy Gertner, whom you may have heard of, who is very good friends with Hillary Clinton. She is a defense attorney and a civil rights lawyer.

**Heininger:** Is she the one that had the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] case recently?

**Saris:** Yes, she had the mob case. That's a great case. Then there's Michael Ponsor, who is in Springfield. The five of us came on at about the same time, followed not too long after by George O'Toole. Senator Kennedy was instrumental in putting together the Merit Selection Commission. You had the leading people on the Bar in Massachusetts. Anyway, that's what happened, and I went on the bench in 1994.

**Heininger:** Have you stayed in touch with Kennedy, or have you stayed in touch with his staff?

**Saris:** More with his staff. When I see the Senator, he always gives me a big hug, and I talk to him. I know Barbara Souliotis up here in the front office, and I keep in close touch with many of the Judiciary Committee staff people. We can go back for a while. He never again had a huge Judiciary Committee staff, that I know of anyway. That tended to be a handful of people. His primary interests were, again, health, education, and labor, minimum wage kinds of issues. He keeps pretty strong people on Judiciary, and I've kept in touch with them.

**Heininger:** Yes, very strong people. He's had a lot of impact.

**Saris:** So I definitely keep in touch with the staff. When I see him up here, I go to his birthday parties and fun stuff like that, but I'm not a social friend of his at all.

**Heininger:** Were there many on the staff who were?

**Saris:** I don't think so. I don't think that was appropriate.

**Heininger:** It's very hard to mix the roles.



**Saris:** I mention Larry Horowitz again because there were very few people who I think crossed the line into actually maybe being a confidant, and I had the impression that Larry was. I'm thinking out loud as I go through the various people who have been on his staff over time, and I don't really know.

**Heininger:** When you moved over to his personal staff, when you were one of the three Judiciary people and you were also doing some of the front office stuff, what issues did you work on?

**Saris:** I still did a lot with government regulation. Ken Feinberg had left, so I also did all the criminal code issues for about a year and a half. When Sandra Day O'Connor came through, I handled that nomination process for him. One of the highlights was meeting her at that time. She's a very gracious woman. When the dairy farmers came to town, I vividly remember handling that, because they were just so intense on whatever piece of legislation they were concerned about. I did a lot with patents and innovation and with picking up some of those issues for Judiciary. I never did immigration. I think Jerry Tinker stayed.

**Heininger:** He did stay.

**Saris:** I never did immigration, never touched it.

**Heininger:** He stayed, and there also was the partnership with Dick Day for [Alan] Simpson that went on for years.

**Saris:** I never touched that. I may have done a little in other what I would call "court management issues." But don't forget, I didn't stay that long after the switch.

**Heininger:** It's tough going from majority to minority.

**Saris:** Although that wasn't the reason.

**Heininger:** No, it's a difficult transition for everybody.

**Saris:** I wasn't as significant in passing legislation, but you see, we weren't as able to be as proactive as before. A lot of our work was blocking things.

**Heininger:** Right.

**Saris:** So I remember that President Reagan came in with his agenda of cutting money from various programs, and much of my time was spent stopping the cutting. Before you could actually make a difference in the way the law looked for trucking or airlines or civil rights legislation, you could make a difference in a more proactive way. I'm sure the other side felt it when they came into power, from their point of view. President Reagan had resurrected the budgetary process, and literally the first six to eight months of when the Senate switched was just stopping cuts in important programs, just fiscally. So I remember more of sticking fingers in different holes sprouting in the dike than I remember proactively trying to put together a piece of legislation.

**Heininger:** It's very difficult to do in the minority. Well, this has been very useful. Thank you.