EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL G. KIRK, JR.

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Marston Mills, Massachusetts

Interviewers

Stephen Knott
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TRANSCRIPT

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Knott: Thanks again, Paul, for agreeing to do this interview.

Kirk: No problem.

Knott: I think the best place to begin would be to just ask you to tell us a little bit about your background, how you first became involved in politics. You were talking to us briefly this morning about your dad. That probably is a great place to start.

Kirk: I was born in Newton, Massachusetts, one of five children. I was the middle child, with two older sisters. When I was a young kid my father was a colonel in World War II, so he was away a lot of the time. My mother brought up the kids, as many moms did in those days, and we had a great family. My father was a public servant. I think his military service, his service as commissioner of public safety as a young man in Massachusetts, and later his judicial career served as an inspiration to me. He served a number of years on the Superior Court of Massachusetts, the highest trial court in the Commonwealth. Then the last ten years of his professional life he was on the Supreme Judicial Court.

Knott: Who put him on the Supreme Judicial Court?

Kirk: Governor Foster Furcolo. He was appointed by Governor [Joseph] Ely to the commissioner position, by Governor [Charles] Hurley to the Superior Court, and then by Foster Furcolo to the Supreme Court. This is just an aside—Senator Kennedy sometimes mentions this but he gets the facts wrong. Senator Kennedy often says that my father was the first Irish Catholic member of the Supreme Judicial Court, but he was probably the second. What happened was that his predecessor, Judge [Edward] Counihan, was not well, and he wanted to be sure that the Governor appointed someone of his faith and heritage. My father wasn't all that excited about going to the Supreme Judicial Court, because he enjoyed the action of the trial court. But he accepted the appointment to the Supreme Judicial Court and that became the Irish Catholic seat on the court. In any event, because of my father's example, I grew up with a sense of the importance of public service.

I always thought that someday I'd run for public office, even as a kid in high school. I went to college at Harvard and majored in government and enjoyed it. That was the period from '56 to '60. John Kennedy's prominence was growing some, particularly in Massachusetts. You had the possibility of the Vice Presidency in 1956 and—those were the days when conventions were really meaningful. All the drama, that was a big deal. Even in the summer, when other kids

would be off doing other things, a lot of my pals and I would be hooked on watching the convention on TV.

Then of course, President Kennedy ran and won in 1960. I had graduated from college in June of '60, and then I was in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. I had just been through Officer Training School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and drove home in a beat-up used '51 Chevy that just made it. It was the day after JFK's inauguration and I'd come through the Blue Ridge Mountains in West Virginia, trucks blowing snow all over the place, the worst possible conditions you could imagine. In any event, I remember driving through Washington, D.C., the day after the inauguration thinking that this is the greatest.

So then I went on to law school after six months active duty in the Reserves. It was during that period that I first met Ted Kennedy—maybe at a reception during his first campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1962. I was one who was really inspired by President Kennedy. There's no other word to use, can't gild the lily. He was the kind of guy who, ten minutes after he took the Presidential oath of public office, had the vision and the guts to challenge the country, something that hasn't happened since and has been sorely needed since. All of that was inspiring—and particularly to the youth. I'm a living example of youth of American inspired by his dramatic and patriotic call to service.

Knott: Paul, can I stop you for a second? You mentioned before we started the tape that your father had a story about the Kennedys?

Kirk: It's about the confluence of events. I told this story, first when named Irishman of the Year by the JFK Library Foundation. The Irish balladeer, Enya, sang a song about "who knows where the roads meet—only time." My father's father was a steamship operator. That industry was on the wane, and he had 14 kids to support. So what were his options? He wanted to stay with steam operation, so he took a civil service exam for the city of Boston. According to my father's account of it, my grandfather topped the list, but his wife, my father's mother, was distrustful of the whole political system. These were the days of Tammany Hall, New York, [William] Boss Tweed and Boston's Martin Lomasney. "No matter that my husband, John [Kirk], gets the top grade," she worried. "Something will happen. Some political connection will likely trump his chances."

So she took herself down to City Hall, she didn't have an appointment, but asked if she could, she'd like to wait to see the mayor. And the mayor was John F. Fitzgerald. So she waited, and he came out at the end of the day. She told him her story about these 14 kids and her husband, how important it was for him to have the job, how he had topped the list on the exam. The mayor took her hand and said, "Don't you worry, little lady." So my grandfather ended up running the old pump station on Columbia Point, now abandoned but only 100 yards, or so, from the JFK Library whose Foundation's Board of Directors, I, John Kirk's grandson, now chair.

Knott: Sure, that's still there.

Kirk: It was operated by steam at the time. In those days what we were doing was polluting the harbor, unknowingly, but nonetheless. So I told the story, "And here we are at the Kennedy

Library and the pump station is here. And here I am, the grandson of the guy who ran the pump station, and here's the library of the President whose grandfather—

Knott: That's a great story.

Kirk: Then, on the other side of the family, my mother's family, her uncle was Cardinal [William] O'Connell. And my mother's older sisters and Rose Kennedy were pals. My aunt was in the Kennedys' wedding. They were married at the Cardinal's residence at Lake Street, as were my mother and father some years later. Those are coincidences that took place at another time, but in any event, that was that story.

I think once while I was in law school I had gone down to Washington during the Kennedy administration to be present when [Jeremiah] Jerry Minihan, who was a Bishop in Boston and a great undergraduate football player at Georgetown, received an honorary degree from Georgetown. Anyway, my father and I went to D.C. and I remember having an opportunity to go to the White House and look around. It was one of those memorable moments. Then of course the assassination took place and it was like—now what?

Knott: You were up here when you heard the news?

Kirk: I was at law school. I remember leaving a class and walking across the yard. I had played some football at Harvard and after I graduated, rather than live in the law school dorms, I lived at the Varsity Club over across the college yard. On the way back from class, someone said that President Kennedy had been shot. It was the usual disbelief—"Oh, come on!" I remember going back to the Varsity Club and turning on the television. It was just like holding your own vigil. Finally I went home, and then that weekend on live TV saw Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald. It was all so tragic and bizarre.

After the President's death, I wrote to Kenny O'Donnell, who had essentially been his Chief of Staff, because I had heard he might be coming back to Massachusetts and was thinking about running for Governor. I guess in my own way I was thinking about—it's a different generation, but Kenny and JFK and I shared the same heritage, the same faith, went to the same college, played football, lived on the Cape, cared about public service and politics, so we had all these things in common. And friends of my father's were pals of Kenny. So I wrote the letter to Kenny as an expression of interest. I said if he ever comes back and does run for Governor, I'd like to help him. It was a way to extend the connection I felt with the Kennedy White House. And Kenny did come back and he ran in 1966. Ben Smith, the former mayor of Gloucester who was appointed to John Kennedy's Senate seat before Edward Kennedy became the Senator, was a good pal of Kenny's, and Ben became a very good friend of mine. He and I helped manage Kenny's campaign. I basically was the guy who went around the state with Kenny, and I ended up doing the same for Senator Ted Kennedy.

Martin: Is this Robert Kennedy's '56 campaign?

Kirk: This was Kenny O'Donnell's Governorship race in 1966. Kenny had been a classmate and teammate of Robert Kennedy's, and that's how Kenny got involved with President Kennedy. He was captain of the Harvard football team. His father was an outstanding coach at Holy Cross and English High. So he had a lot of pals around the state through his father, and I had a lot of friends

through my father. So Kenny and I had a two-man campaign tag team in 1966. He ran against Maurice Donahue, who was the president of the State Senate, and Eddie McCormack. John Volpe was Governor. Kenny contested at the Democratic State Convention, didn't win, but stayed in through the primary and then was defeated. He had given it his best shot. He ran again in '70, and lost. Kenny was an enormously principled guy.

I guess more than anything else Kenny O'Donnell, by example, epitomized what true loyalty was—almost to a fault. He gave up everything that he might have done himself for President Kennedy. People have written that Kenny would have taken the bullet voluntarily, rather than have it happen to the President. He was very much that kind of a guy.

Knott: Paul, can I ask you a question about Kenny O'Donnell and Ted Kennedy? We've heard stories that it was not a great relationship. Could you comment on that? Some people have suggested O'Donnell opposed Ted Kennedy's run in '62.

Kirk: I don't know that it was actual opposition, but I do know that Kenny didn't think Ted's running for the U.S. Senate in 1962 was a good idea; that it was too much Kennedy, too much dynasty, and not helpful to the President. And that's what I mean, i.e. anything that Kenny thought might, in any way, dilute John Kennedy's strengths, interests, advantages, Kenny would question. As a result, I don't think Ted ever felt all that warmly toward Kenny. I remember during the '66 Gubernatorial campaign there was the question of whether Ted would endorse Kenny, and it never came to be. I think they respected each other all right, but what Kenny viewed as a conflict with JFK's interest caused a little bit of a breach that never quite knitted together the way I would have hoped. So I think that was the genesis of it, I don't think there was anything more than that. It was just that Kenny was calling it the way he saw it, and Ted probably felt—you know, *What the hell is this?*

In any event, after law school I started off at Hale and Dorr, which is a large Boston firm, and after some months, maybe a year-and-a-half, I thought, this firm is too big for me. It will be ten years before I meet a client, because you're down in the stacks and doing all the back room research. And I still had the bug; the blood was running in terms of public service, and I was wondering what would I do. I went to see [Thomas] Tip O'Neill one day when he came home on a weekend. I told him I wanted to do something in public service. He said, "Let me ask around." Garrett Byrne was the DA of Suffolk County, and Ted Kennedy had worked for him for a year or two . But there were no openings in his office. In the meantime, I left Hale and Dorr and joined up with Joe Malone to practice law. Joe, who had been a pal of a lot of senior Kennedy folks, and Dan Gallagher, who was another guy more of my age, and I had this small firm, Malone, Gallagher and Kirk, and I was much happier than I had been in the larger firm.

I kept my application in at Suffolk County and at Middlesex County, and I was eventually appointed Assistant District Attorney at Middlesex County by John Droney, who was the District Attorney. So I received some good trial experience but I was thinking to myself, *Is this the way justice is dispensed? Letting a young guy like me get up before a six-man jury?* But in any event, it was great training and a good opportunity.

Along comes 1968, or leading up to '68. I was the toastmaster at a dinner for the charitable Irish society in Boston. James Michael Curley used to say, "They're neither charitable, nor Irish."

[*laughter*] It was a black-tie dinner at which the toastmaster proposes a toast to the city of Boston, to the Commonwealth, to the United States of America, and to the Day we Celebrate (St. Patrick's Day). Responses to each toast were offered, respectively, by the mayor, the Governor, and by Ted Kennedy, to the toast to the United States, and by the Irish Ambassador. That was on a Saturday night.

The next day Robert Kennedy was going to come to Boston to march in Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade, and then return to New York to march in that city's parade. So it was big-time excitement. I remember years later Ted would say to me, "I remember when you spoke at some dinner." It was the first time he reacted, "Who's this kid?" so I had made some kind of impression.

There had been a lot of conversations about Bobby Kennedy in 1968, "Will he run or won't he," and all that speculation. So when RFK decided to run, Kenny said to me, "Would you come to Washington and work on the Robert Kennedy campaign?" I thought, *This is a once in a lifetime thing*. I was just getting my law practice together, but I thought, *This is too important—a must do*.

So we went to Washington. Kenny and I shared a suite in the Mayflower Hotel and the headquarters was down on L Street. His responsibility, which I shared, was basically to work with the big city mayors, the Governors of the major industrial states, and the labor unions, and to try to convince them that they ought not to commit to anyone until Robert Kennedy had a chance to prove himself in the primaries, despite the pressure they were under from Hubert Humphrey and despite all the good will that existed between Humphrey and these folks. So that was the essential core responsibility and it required a lot of phone calls. I didn't really leave the headquarters much, nor did Kenny, but there were people coming into Washington. We'd meet with them and make the case that time, patience, and RFK's performance in the primaries to demonstrate who would be the stronger candidates in the general election are important here.

Martin: Did you start before [Lyndon] Johnson announced he wasn't going to run?

Kirk: Yes. For me, it was all an enormously educational experience. The Mayflower is right across the street from a restaurant called Paul Young's, and then right around the corner was another, Duke Zeibert's. So you had all these guys who were members of Congress, and other folks who had been around in the JFK period. They were Kenny's pals, and I got to know them, all good people. It was just an eye-opening experience.

Knott: Were you getting commitments from these folks? How difficult was it to counter the Humphrey incumbency—he wasn't the incumbent President, but he was the Vice President.

Kirk: It was very difficult to get positive commitments. It took some doing to get people just to wait and see. But I think partly because of the expectation and the excitement that surrounded Robert Kennedy's campaign, and the crowd response his appearances, people were saying, "We'd better keep our powder dry here." There were others, who were great friends of Kenny's and became good pals of mine, who had already committed to Humphrey, like Danny Rostenkowski, who was an important player in Chicago. But it was all in good humor. Even if they had already committed to Humphrey, there was mutual respect back and forth. So I met a

lot of people in the political world, and that may have been a reason why later I ended up being asked to join Ted Kennedy's staff.

But then it ended; it was perhaps two-and-a-half months, because I went to D.C. in mid-March, right after RFK's announcement in '68, and of course, it was over in June. We went up to New York, helped in planning the funeral, and returned to D.C. on the funeral train. I can still remember young Joe [Kennedy II]; he was just a kid, walking through that train. I will tell you, personally, I was destroyed. The best way I can describe it—it was the end of hope. We'd already lost President Kennedy by assassination, then Martin Luther King, now RFK, and I decided, this is it for me. I'm not doing this any more. My emotions were wrung out. I couldn't get far enough away; I went to Hawaii for about a week, just to be away and get some perspective on life. I came back and I said, "That's it, it's too much. John and Robert Kennedy both inspired the nation. They tried to do the right and good thing—committing themselves to public life, and then they're blown away. So to hell with it."

For the next year I was back practicing law in Boston. And then for close to a year Dave Burke, Ted Kennedy's administrative assistant, and others were saying, "Why don't you come down and join Ted's staff?" I said, "I'm not coming." Then finally I thought to myself, *Jesus, if the fourth and last surviving brother somehow can suck it up after the losses that he's endured and continue the struggle, who the hell am I to be wallowing in the grief?* So without Senator Ted Kennedy even saying a word, it was like, *Okay, Paul, get a life. You've got to get out of this*. It was Ted Kennedy's own example that inspired me to get involved again. So Dave Burke—have you done Dave yet?

Knott: We talk to him all the time, we've not done a formal interview yet.

Kirk: He kids me, "I remember they were painting your name on that door and I came in—" meaning the law firm door. What happened to me was—and this happens to a lot of young guys—I said to myself, "I will do this in Washington for two years, this will be a great experience." Seven years later I looked at my watch and said, "I have got to get out of here."

Martin: You got the Washington fever?

Kirk: It wasn't really that so much. Partly it was Senator Kennedy's office per se—compared to other offices. I'm willing to bet it's the same today; the interest and attention that was visited on him as a human being and as a public figure, plus his work ethic, plus the kinds of issues that he chose to get involved in, and the reasons for those choices. It was like, "this is as good as it gets." You are right in the firestorm there. His staff, I'm sure, still have to run like hell just to keep up with him. Enormous endurance and intellectual and physical energy. You've met him enough to understand all that.

Knott: He keeps us hopping, too.

Kirk: I don't know how he does it, it's remarkable. Anyway, that's sort of the transition that occurred and how I got involved with Senator Kennedy.

Knott: So obviously your O'Donnell connection was no impediment to you at all, in terms of moving into Senator Ted Kennedy's—

Kirk: No. I remember having a little bit of a twinge myself, wondering whether Kenny would resent it or not, but we talked about it, and he was fine. Kenny and his gang held a little going away party for me before I went to D.C., and it was all fine. And of course, Kenny and I stayed in touch. I was his attorney and I was with him when he died—very sad.

Martin: Can we go back to the '68 campaign for a few minutes?

Kirk: Yes.

Martin: Did you have much interaction with Ted Kennedy during the campaign period?

Kirk: Not all that much, because he was always either on the road or up in the Senate, one of the two. He didn't spend a lot of time at the headquarters. Steve Smith was there quite a bit. I remember maybe two or three occasions during that couple of months where he would come in, and I'd have an opportunity to give him an update on the area of our responsibilities. That was basically it. We'd brief Dave Burke or whoever it was, if the Senator was going to a state where Kenny and I were involved, on whom to be sure to contact, and who might be on the fence, and that kind of thing. The only face-to-face meetings I had with him were the ones I described, just briefings when he came through.

Martin: Did you have much of a sense about his larger role within the campaign, how central he was for Robert Kennedy's campaign?

Kirk: I wasn't at any of the meetings before Robert Kennedy announced. I think Ted had some misgivings about it, about whether this ought to go forward. You'll probably get that from him. But once the decision was made, he did everything he could. I think most of his work for the campaign was either in the Senate, trying to persuade colleagues, and learning from colleagues what might be going on in their state and with their constituencies; or making appearances for Robert Kennedy, speaking at a Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner or something to rally the troops for Bobby. So I can't give you the details. I don't know enough. I assume there was a lot of base-touching and phone calls on core decisions.

The thing that was interesting, which was sort of an eye-opener for me, was that at the RFK headquarters, not unlike what happens in a lot of campaigns, you had three different levels of Kennedys. You had the John Kennedy group: Ted Sorensen, Kenny—and sometimes they'd work together and sometimes they didn't, so there was a little tension there. Then you had the Robert Kennedy group: This is *our* candidate, screw the *John* Kennedy people, and who do the *Ted* people think they are? Then you had the Ted Kennedy people. I'm in there looking at this from the outside and thinking, *Jesus, if the American people knew what was really going on*. But it happens in every campaign, there's always internal friction going on. But it's sort of the normal—well, I shouldn't say normal, because it's such a different chapter of history and all. But there were those tensions within. It was nothing that impeded the progress of the campaign, but I wondered, why is all this necessary?

Knott: Then there were other family members as well, right? Sisters and—

Kirk: Oh, yes. And none of them shy, and none of them without an opinion, and all of them smart—as is true of all aspects of the Kennedy family and life. To me it's so remarkable that

each and every one of them is, in one way or another, working for the public good—the Special Olympics, the Very Special Arts, you can go down the line. As I say, no shrinking violets in the garden. All fun and all constructive. That's probably the best I can do with that question.

Martin: Do you recall what your impressions were of Ted Kennedy during that campaign?

Kirk: By that time, this was a serious Senator who had basically, in everything I had seen and observed, made up his mind that he was going to be a good Senator, was going to learn the ropes. There wasn't anything else out there. Obviously, he had lost one brother in the war, and the President was gone. If Bobby chose to run, fine. Ted's role was to be an active, working legislator. Marty Nolan of the *Boston Globe* wrote something early on about the difference between a workhorse and a show horse, and how everyone expected Senator Edward Kennedy to live off the name. Quite to the contrary. He engaged early with Richard Russell and all these guys who were two generations older than he, and he learned the ropes, and he kept his head down. So my impression of him was that here's a guy you like to see and you're glad to meet, and that he's serious-minded about what he's going to do. Though, obviously, a member of an important family.

At the same time—although I didn't see that much of this aspect of him then, because it was schedules and so forth, but it's almost the same way today—when he walks into a room, he just fills it. Vroom, sucks all the oxygen out. He's always got a story.

Knott: When you joined the Senate staff, can you give us a sense of who the key people were in the Senator's office at that time?

Kirk: When I joined the Senate staff, he was the Assistant Majority Leader. Wayne Owens was the fellow who had the responsibility for the Assistant Majority Whip's job, the Assistant Majority Leader's job. Largely, I think, because there was no space for me anywhere else, I had the happy experience of working out of the Assistant Majority Leader's office, which was a majestic office in the Capitol building. Shortly thereafter, Wayne moved that office to an even more spacious office that overlooked the view down Pennsylvania Avenue. Wayne and I became very good friends. So that's where I was.

Dave Burke was the administrative assistant. I think Dun Gifford was then the legislative assistant. Ann Straus worked with Dave. Carey Parker was there, Dale de Haan headed up the Refugee Subcommittee. Jim Flug was the head guy on the Administrative Practices and Procedures Subcommittee. Bob Bates, an African-American fellow, had that constituency to manage. I can't remember whether Mark Schneider was there when I arrived. He was certainly there while I was there, but I don't know if he was there at the outset. Angelique Voutselas [Lee] was the Senator's secretary. I know I'm missing a whole raft of them. But Dave ran the office.

Knott: Dave Burke?

Kirk: Yes.

Knott: What were you?

Kirk: Almost no matter what position I held—I was initially assigned to the Administrative Practices and Procedures Subcommittee of Judiciary, so I worked on some of those issues with Flug. But it was understood that I would be the political guy, if you will, sort of politics at large, and then the contact guy, to be the eyes and ears looking and listening out on the whole larger political situation. So that, as you can imagine, took up most of my time. You just had the dynamic of another Kennedy in the Senate and the wonderment about what his political plans might be. No matter how large or small it was, there was a constituency in the country that was still hopeful that no matter what they'd been through—

Martin: How did your job come to be mostly political rather than policy? Was that initially the intent?

Kirk: I think the Senator and Dave had politics and policy in mind before I joined the staff, because that's, in a strange sort of way—this is basically looking back—how it evolved. I did some of the policy stuff, particularly when it overlapped in terms of how does this go politically and how does it go in Massachusetts—that's sort of how it worked. They saw me as a guy who, for whatever reason, people would relate to and willingly call or talk to, and I would listen. So I had some respect for the political constituency areas. I think they thought this would be a good role for me, and it was probably something that would take a lot off Dave's desk, or whoever else was doing it at the time. So I think that's how it happened, you sort of brought this short history with you and then, "Let's see how he does."

That was in April, I think, of '69. And then Chappaquiddick hit in the summer. That was a very difficult time for everyone. But then on the political side, just to pick up after that, what happened was the 1970 campaign came almost on the heels of that. I did for the Senator what I had done for Kenny, and that meant being with him all the time during the '70 campaign. The '70 campaign became a special kind of campaign, in the sense that he wanted to be in front of as many people as possible, who could ask us whatever questions they wanted—all because after the Chappaquiddick incident, and the court ordeal, and the rest of it, I think there was a feeling that maybe he hadn't been forthcoming. And there were all these difficulties. Senator Kennedy understood that climate and he said, "I want to be out there, meeting as many people as I can, one-on-one, face-to-face, town meetings." It was exhausting.

Martin: I can imagine.

Kirk: You had this fellow, Jack Crimmins, have you—?

Knott: Oh, sure.

Kirk: He was a funny guy, irreverent guy, that Ted met during his tenure as Assistant DA in Garrett Byrne's office. Jack was the Senator's driver. He was an older man by then, he may have been the age I am now or a little older, but he certainly seemed older. He'd bitch all the way. He loved to rag Kennedy. He'd say, "You know Ronald Reagan's campaign? Ronald Reagan, he gets up and at ten o'clock in the morning, he does a press conference. He goes home, has three Bloody Marys and lunch, takes a nap. He gets up at four, has a press conference. That's it!"

Here we were at a plant gate at 6:30 in the morning, and I'm telling you, we had maybe twenty more stops, including speeches to Kiwanis Clubs and town meetings. Just day after day after day.

In the meantime, the Senator is still suffering from his back problems. So you always had to schedule the tub stop at somebody's home just before a dinner engagement and speech. It was brutal. And at every stop I'd have to anticipate who was going to be there—trying to be helpful with the notes. Then I'd have the follow-up from the 14 people who handed him something on the way. Then I'd be trying to modulate the speeches, the press conferences, editorial boards.

As a much younger kid, I had naively thought that if there was an educational aspect in a campaign, it was education that the candidate imparted to the constituency. But you learn very soon that it is just as importantly an education of the candidate. If you campaign as intensely and listen as seriously as he did, you get it all coming back. It really is an amazing experience if you put your heart and soul into it, as took place then. I never forgot what I learned in that '70 campaign about how much of an education it can be for a public official.

Martin: So in that vein, did you see him update speeches, for example, based on what he had heard the day before from constituents? Was he responsive in that kind of way, education-wise?

Kirk: Yes, I wouldn't say that he'd change a position about which he felt deeply, but if he knew that he could affect a problem or an issue that hadn't occurred to him before, and it was on the mind of a portion of the people in Massachusetts or some district in Massachusetts, he would absorb it and then resonate by maybe saying deliberately, "I was told something I had never heard in Chicopee last night." I mean, he was very good in terms of that stuff. It's not just, *Well, I listened, but I really didn't hear*. He was absorbing it all. It was a grueling exercise.

Martin: Do you remember how many months you campaigned like that? Was it just the general? He wouldn't have had a primary challenger? Did he have a primary challenger or not?

Kirk: In '70, I don't think so. I think it would have been Mike Robertson?

Knott: That was Josiah Spaulding.

Kirk: Oh, yes. Cy Spaulding. You know, it was the feeling that you had to do well, and he had to do well. So everybody just poured their heart and soul into the thing.

Knott: You two hit it off? I mean, you're in a very stressful situation, you and the Senator—

Martin: And close quarters.

Knott: There must have been moments when it was—

Kirk: Yes, because if something didn't go right—

Knott: You were the first to hear about it.

Kirk: And he was exhausted. But yes, I must say, remarkably well. I can't remember a time that we were slamming doors, or doing any of that.

Martin: How flexible was he as a campaigner? Some politicians, if things don't go particularly right, they get knocked off of their script, and it doesn't go so well at the next event. Did he, if things weren't perfectly set up, was he able to adjust his speeches or make changes on the fly?

Kirk: Yes, pretty well, I would say. It wasn't as if this was his debut. I mean, he grew up with campaigns—his grandfather and then his brothers, and so forth. He always remembered when something had screwed up in his brother's campaign. To this day he still doesn't trust a teleprompter. Why? Because somewhere back in John Kennedy's campaign the teleprompter went berserk and it's like, "Okay, we don't do that." You remember the time that [William] Clinton's teleprompter got screwed up on the health thing and no one knew it until five days later or so?

Knott: Yes, sure.

Kirk: But in terms of getting along, there are bound to be things. We might get lost, like if Jack took a wrong turn—of course, he'd find a way to dump all over Crimmins because the reverse would come back—or if you didn't have the right material at the ready. Well, you know, shame on us. But he would never unfairly criticize. I frankly don't remember, now that you ask, that there were any serious fireworks, remarkably enough. I mean, if there was a problem, I'd usually have to be the troubleshooter to go back to the staff and say, "Can't have this happen again."

Knott: How much was Chappaquiddick an issue? Was it something you heard from folks at that time when you were out meeting people, or was this a media—was the media focusing on that? To what extent was Chappaquiddick a factor in that '70 election, do you recall?

Kirk: Clearly it was an issue for the media, and then it became sort of an unwritten hurdle or threshold that people had set up. But also, I think that Senator Kennedy felt that people were looking at him much differently than they might have before. He wanted to be sure that people had an opportunity to really exchange with him and test him.

Knott: Do you recall any voter pressing him on that? You said he would do these town hall meetings. I assume these were question and answer type things. Did he ever get pressed on that?

Kirk: You know, remarkably, I don't think he was. I think he wanted people to feel that they could, but I don't remember anybody doing an ugly one-on-one.

Martin: Did he ever bring it up himself, do you remember?

Kirk: No.

Knott: Did you notice any—you had started in April '69, this hit in July '69. Did you see any changes in him?

Kirk: Yes, I think so. For a while, the remorse was palpable. It's one thing to have lost your own flesh and blood, and it's another thing to have a sense of responsibility for the loss of another person. He felt that deeply, I think there's no question about it. He did his best with her parents, calling and—but it affected him as it would any of us. There was no reason to talk about it. Like so many other things, even including his brother, or losses we all experience, time eventually

heals the wound but you don't ever forget. And he has—whatever it is, part of it is faith, part of it is his own resilience, he's just able to keep going on.

Martin: During the campaign did you still serve as a political advisor, or were you more a front man to make sure that administrative things happened?

Kirk: Both.

Martin: Do you remember how he responded to your advice? Were you on the same page most of the time?

Kirk: Yes, when you're there in close contact every single hour of the day, you either bond or you don't. If we hadn't, I would have been out of that car—and fairly enough. But we got along, and I think he would probably say that he grew to respect my judgment and instincts. I say that only because he has asked me to do so many other things in his life, legally and otherwise. If he hadn't had a sense of confidence in both my instincts and the fact that I would have his interests at heart, that wouldn't have happened.

But probably during the '70 campaign—I don't know this, but that period of being together all day, every day, might have been a time when he thought, *This is somebody we can work with*. Then things went on from there.

Knott: Shortly after he wins that reelection, rather handily I think, with 61% of the vote, he loses his Majority Whip position. Could you tell us a little bit about that, Paul?

Kirk: Yes. I wish Wayne Owens was still around to tell you. As I said, Wayne and I became very good friends. I went out to the Canyonlands with him and we spent some great times together. He was very active on Kennedy's campaign. But this was—

Knott: Did he really want to be Majority Whip?

Kirk: I think he wanted to be Majority Whip, but didn't want to be the Assistant Majority Leader. Do you know what I mean? This is partly looking back on it. It would be nice to have a senior position in the Senate—and I was not there in the deliberations about whether to take on Russell Long or not, so this is past history to me. But I had the sense that the Senate was his thing, and that an official position of Senate leadership would be a good thing to have, but the work was a pain in the neck. It was holding hands with all these members and their staffs and an enormous amount of time, and I don't think he had the disposition for it.

Then with the '70 campaign, he was consumed by that and making sure he got re-elected—so he wasn't around. Bobby Byrd, who knew that Senate like the back of his hand, saw this opportunity. I think Senator Kennedy was surprised that some who had told him they'd be for him ended up not being for him. I think that was the biggest disappointment—not so much that he lost, but that he thought he was going to win because he thought he had the word of his colleagues. In the sweep of history that we're talking about, it was not the most serious thing that ever happened that he didn't hold on to that position. He still had a great relationship with Mike Mansfield and, as it turns out, with Bobby Byrd.

Knott: I was going to ask if that worked out okay between the two of them.

Kirk: You mean now?

Knott: Yes.

Kirk: Byrd is kind of a funny guy. After he [Kennedy] lost the Majority Leader position, with the spacious office with crystal chandeliers and views and light—I ended up sitting in the Refugee Subcommittee office, which is in the bowels of the Russell Senate Office Building. My file cabinet was a fireplace. I mean, there wasn't room to change your mind in that office. It was three women, three guys. It was nothing to describe. But right across the hall was Bobby Byrd's office. At 6:30 at night you'd hear that fiddle going. This was his culture, this is what he enjoyed. He could play the fiddle, old West Virginia. Then, I forget what year it was, we campaigned with Senator Byrd and Jay Rockefeller, who was then Governor. Just imagine Byrd and Rockefeller in West Virginia, it was like—

Martin: It's hard to imagine they represent the same state.

Kirk: Yes, it was like, what's wrong with this picture? But then you see the alliances between Bobby Byrd and Ted Kennedy, like their opposition to the current Iraq war. So anyway, they came back together. So then it was on with Senate business and basically more Senator Kennedy's own committee choices, assignments, and what he wanted to do with them. For the most part, the issues in which he got involved—whether you talk to Adam Clymer, or go through his legislative record, which is historic in any event—the legacy of this guy, the legislative legacy and the larger Kennedy legacy, has as much to do with his heart and his character, and why he chose certain committees versus others—why this guy, who could be doing anything else he wanted, chose issues that related to people at their kitchen tables, or their job security, or their retirement security, or their health security. So you could see in his public life as well as in his personal life, his caring for people.

A couple of things, just on the human side. In the Senate, Senator Phil Hart of Michigan was—after his brothers, I would say he was Senator Kennedy's idol. Phil Hart was the conscience of the Senate; that was the informal name that people gave him. When Phil Hart was dying, every single night when Ted Kennedy left the Senate, he went to Phil Hart's bedside. Another example of his caring was Paula Hadley. She was a young woman who worked for him; her folks lived in Sandwich or Sagamore on Cape Cod. He never came over the Sagamore bridge without stopping to spend an hour or two with that family. There are a million different stories, similar kinds of stories that demonstrate his caring heart.

Part of the wonderment of it is that the guy is as busy as he is, with the public needs, demands, and agenda, this enormous family on the other side, and then there is this whole other world of people that he knows or is associated with, his friends—his thoughtfulness toward them all. Maybe this is psychobabble or whatever, but a guy who has had as much heartache as he has had in his life never forgets what it is to bring some comfort to someone. It's like, he never misses. Maybe it's just a phone call.

Knott: We keep hearing this.

Kirk: I believe that his colleagues would tell you the same thing, even face-to-face adversaries in the Senate.

But back to the Senate matters; you can look at his choices of committees or you can go down that roll call of issues that he has spent an enormous amount of time working on or working toward, that are going to impact and affect people that he'll never meet. But he knows his Senate work is about human needs and security.

Knott: Leading up to 1972, every time a Presidential election approached, Senator Kennedy's name was always circulating in the media, speculation and so forth. Can you tell us a little bit, do you recall anything from '72 when he was perhaps weighing a possible run, and then once [George] McGovern actually secured the nomination his name was first and foremost as a possible Vice Presidential candidate? I assume you were in the thick of that.

Kirk: In some ways the years blur in my mind because it was this constant teasing and wooing. But '72, I think there was a lot of hope on the one hand, speculation on the other, maybe even an expectation in Massachusetts that he'd run. I think this is before young Teddy was stricken with cancer.

Knott: That's right. I believe that was '73.

Kirk: I don't remember specific conversations with him about "what do you think." It was out there. And there was the whole [Richard] Nixon thing. Nixon was apoplectic about the possibility that Ted was going to run. I think the Senator didn't mind leaving him in that state or letting him wonder and think about it, and worry about it. It wasn't something that dictated how he conducted his public policy, but if Nixon was awake at night worrying about it, that would be fine with him. If he spoke at a Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner, and the crowd would get pumped and all that, that would be fine. He was having his own enjoyment about it and maybe also laying some sort of a base for who-knows-what will ever happen down the road. He was clearly a dominant political force and public figure, but as far as the actual Presidential story, I think it was more a press issue. He would tease it a little bit, there's no question about it. I'll never forget, whether it was this '72 cycle or another cycle—or maybe all of them—like with Tip O'Neill—Ted would kid and say, "Keep me alive, Tip, keep the name out there." So he'd have a little fun with it that way.

When it got down to serious business in '72, I remember we were down at the Miami convention and there was a lot of phone calling back and forth about Kevin White as a possible Vice Presidential nominee. Senator Kennedy came to Miami to introduce McGovern to the convention—

Knott: It was like three in the morning.

Kirk: The convention went until three in the morning. So he arrived prepared to deliver his speech in prime time, but we spent whatever number of wasted hours, working on the teleprompter. I said, "Listen, if we do this enough, you'll have memorized this speech." So during those hours, he was a player sort of behind the scenes. Some people said he deep-sixed Kevin White.

Knott: I wanted to ask you about that.

Kirk: I was in Miami. I do remember there was a story written that Kevin White didn't make the cut with McGovern because of Senator Kennedy and someone else. Then your notes reminded me that it was [Sargent] Shriver after [Thomas] Eagleton was dropped from the ticket.

Knott: Right.

Kirk: I don't know about that.

Knott: But McGovern did press Senator Kennedy to take the second spot.

Kirk: Oh, yes. That was a big push, and I think a big disappointment to McGovern.

Martin: Did he ever talk about why he didn't take it?

Kirk: No, not to my recollection. It would be speculation on my part. I think he figured, *Hey, I could get more done in the Senate and keep going on there*. I don't know whether he felt that the ticket wouldn't make it no matter who was on it. I just don't know that. It was not one of those things that was so close a call or so possible that he'd call and say, "What do you think?" I think he just—

Martin: It was off the table?

Kirk: "This is not what I want to do." Yes.

Martin: Can I jump back just a little bit? I was curious what your recollections were about how the staff responded when Byrd took over the slot from Kennedy. Were there efforts by the staff to try to get Kennedy back into the leadership position? Or did the staff—

Kirk: No. I think Wayne was devastated because he figured, *I thought I had this thing counted up right*. I think the staff felt that it was probably a mistake anyway.

Martin: Why was that?

Kirk: Because he wasn't going to spend the kind of time that was needed to really do the Assistant Majority Leader's job. His temperament was different from what was called for there. He had larger issues, legislative issues, that he wanted to have an impact on, and this was basically tending to detail, tending to procedure, tending to egos. That's a whole different way to go to work every day. I think with just the personality, the characteristics that Ted Kennedy brings to work every day, that this was not his deal. He probably understood that. On the second go around, meaning Byrd challenging Kennedy, he didn't want to lose, but he probably won by losing after all.

The staff just went back to doing what they were doing anyway. So it wasn't as if it was a crisis of confidence, what will they think of us, or anything like that. There was no time for it anyway, because he just said, "Okay." Then you had Watergate, Vietnam, all these things breaking across

the desk. So it wasn't a major hiccup. He'd rather have won just to say he didn't lose, but then when you won, what did you win anyway?

Knott: Right. In our briefing materials, our researcher highlighted a few events with Governor George Wallace and this invitation that the Senator received to speak at a Fourth of July celebration in Alabama. Do you have any recollections of that? It strikes me as a very odd, must have been a somewhat memorable event, these two—

Kirk: Yes, you've got to remember that in 1968 Robert Kennedy was able to bridge this gap between the Wallace folks and the blacks—Indiana was the perfect example—so as a political matter, that was the case. The second thing was, here was Governor Wallace who had been shot, and for whom Senator Kennedy felt personal empathy, apart from all the racial disagreements that had gone on. This was the time when the South, on the race issue, was just moving away from the Democratic Party. I ran into it big time during my chairmanship, and I paid a visit to Governor Wallace as well; there's a picture in my office.

So this was symbolic, a gesture, a little bit out of the ordinary, but I think something that made sense for him to do. It sent a signal that at the end of the day, we're all going to be in this together, so let's do it.

Knott: Did you go with him on the trip?

Kirk: Yes.

Knott: How was the response?

Kirk: You mean from Wallace?

Knott: From Wallace or from the crowd, at the speech.

Kirk: I think because of Senator Kennedy's personality, people were fascinated to see him and wondering what the hell was he doing here anyway. But a lot of attention was paid to it, obviously; the press loved it. He could speak to this better than I, but my bet is that some of the Senators from the southern part of the country thought this was okay to do, this was a good thing to do. Anytime you can bridge gaps and close ranks in politics, you're much better off. Today? I've never seen it quite this bad. So there really wasn't any down side, when you think about it.

Knott: Paul, there were stories at the time, and they've persisted to this day, that Senator Kennedy and his staff were the guiding force behind the whole impeachment effort against Richard Nixon. Do you have any comment on that? That it was Senator Kennedy who first got the ball rolling on what led to the Watergate investigation of Sam Ervin. And that Archie Cox was a Kennedy guy and all this stuff.

Kirk: That may be a little bit of an overstatement, but he was clearly involved. If there was wrongdoing, part of the responsibility was to ferret it out. Jim Flug was then on the staff. If you needed somebody to help do some of that, Jim is very resourceful. The Senator had a couple of Bobby's people, Walter Sheridan, Carmine Bellino—

Knott: John Doar, right? Wasn't he—he was in the Justice Department with Bobby, I think.

Kirk: Right. So you had folks like that who had sources, and Archie Cox clearly was a friend and someone he greatly respected. I don't have any clear and precise recollections of the what, when, and why, but during that chapter of history, Senator Kennedy was then and remains now a central force in almost anything that was going on. So probably what you've heard is true.

Martin: We skipped over this, but in 1971 you moved from holding a committee office to the personal staff?

Kirk: Yes.

Martin: Was there any change in responsibilities at that point?

Kirk: No.

Martin: So just a physical location.

Kirk: Yes. Well, the physical location change was from the Majority Leader's office to the Refuge Subcommittee office, but I was not on the Refugee Subcommittee. It was basically a move from a committee staff, which would have been the Administrative Practice and Procedures Committee, to his Senate staff. By that time it was partly a payroll issue, the functions didn't change all that much.

Martin: Do you recall what your day-to-day concerns were, in terms of advising him?

Kirk: Yes. Basically it was, first of all, the political details—the schedule, what appearances, what invitations to accept, what invitations to generate or to seek out because it would be the right kind of forum for a particular speech. Also it was being his surrogate if he couldn't see people who were coming into town and wanted to talk just generally about what was going on where they live or in their state. And then maintaining the contact with them; correspondence that might be political in nature, input on almost all of the speeches, being available to him for, "What do you think about this?" on whatever the issue would be. Then staff meetings generally.

So that was the general makeup of things. Sometimes I would represent him at something, not so much to give a speech on his behalf, but to show the colors. Then just because it was my job and function, I'd see people on the other side of the Hill, or the labor guys, and maybe go to their events. I sort of kept the network together.

Martin: So were most of your actions attempting to maintain his presence as a national figure?

Kirk: Yes, clearly it was a national constituency. Some of it was his own and some of it was from his brother's days. While there was never any spoken "yes" or "no"—one of the rules I have about politics, or maybe about life in general, is try not, whatever you do, to foreclose any options. In public life, political life, I think that's an important principle to operate by. When you have someone of the prominence of a Ted Kennedy, you don't want to close any doors, but you don't want to heighten expectations so that people's hopes are dashed if you don't do anything. So you have to be kind of balanced about it. That was the way I approached those things.

Martin: Were you, or was somebody on the staff, more concerned with his role within the Senate, his stature, or position, or was that not a concern?

Kirk: I don't think that people felt there were conflicts. Again, it was a balance. More often than not, he would be the one who would decide what issues he wanted to spend time on. Before every Congress adjourned, he'd get the group together and talk about what might be ahead, what the next session would look like. What will I do with this period of time? What are the issues, either for Massachusetts or for the nation, that are going to make the biggest difference? What's timely, what's important? It might be on the domestic front, it might be international. Then you work out the game plan. To the degree that any of those might have impact on the national profile, fine, but I don't believe it was ever the reverse, where hyping the national profile was the reason for selecting a particular issue to work on in the Senate. That was never in the equation. It was always unspoken, I guess, that if you work hard and you do well, and you're doing it for the right reasons, and you can build up a constituency to help advance the cause here, the other stuff will take care of itself.

So that's sort of the way it worked, but it was never talked about. It was just, this was the code. There wasn't a lot of calculating going on. I know the Kennedy Senate staff always got a bad rap. This may apply to particular individuals if, indeed, it ever took place, but it was said that the Kennedy staff would run roughshod over others. If it was true it was never deliberate. The Kennedy Senate staff were basically trying to keep up with the Senator in terms of his industry and energy, "You've got to go 110 percent, that's why we're here." If ever I hear about public servants with no work ethic, all I think about is, hey, I've got a guy you should meet because he turns all that right on its head. You don't see anybody in private life, you don't see anybody, anywhere, who just is constantly, constantly going at Senator Kennedy's pace.

So back to your question, I don't think there was ever a calculation about things. It was just, you do the best you can to forward his work in the Senate, and if there's a residual benefit that comes from the respect of his colleagues, or the press, or some sort of a national audience, that's fine.

Martin: Can we take a brief break?

[BREAK]

Knott: I guess we're up to the point where you're leaving the Senator's office. You leave in 1977 to practice law in D.C.?

Kirk: Right, I joined Sullivan & Worcester in April of '77, with the understanding that I would eventually be in their Washington office. I came back and spent the better part of a year in their Boston office because I wanted to get a sense of the clientele and the partners, and then I went back to Washington in '78. That's when this draft stuff started.

Martin: Why did you leave Kennedy's office?

Kirk: As I said to you, I went down for what was to be two years, and it had been almost seven already, and I knew I didn't want to be on the Senate staff for the rest of my life. I had to have my own career. So that was basically it. I just thought I needed to do my own thing at some point. So law made sense, and the firm had a Washington office, and by that time I'd had seven years experience, so it was a good fit. That was basically the reason. There was no disaffection, none of that. It was just time to do my own thing.

One of the great blessings of having been in the Senator's office is that's where I met Gail [Kirk].

Knott: I didn't realize that.

Kirk: Yes, I had this resolve that office romances would never happen to me; it's the worst thing that can ever happen because if they go south then it's a problem. So as the guy says, "The rest is history." Gail worked for Eddie Martin. Over the course of time we hit it off, and we got married in '74. Then when I left the office, Gail also left, and she went to work at the State Department for a while. When the '80 campaign started, she thought*, I'm not supposed to be in the Carter Administration, I know that*. So she left. But that was how that transition took place. My leaving was basically just a personal thing, *This is much too long. It was great, no experience like it, and no other staff like it, and no other Senator like it. But no one is indispensable and I've got to get out of here*.

Martin: In that period where you were not officially working for Senator Kennedy, say '77, '78—

Kirk: To 2005.

Martin: To 2005. [*laughter*] Sorry. Well, you went back for the '80 campaign and worked.

Kirk: Yes.

Martin: To 2005—did he call on you still as a political advisor?

Kirk: Yes.

Martin: How regularly were you in contact?

Kirk: Oh, he had hired other people to perform my function. How regularly? I couldn't say for certain. But by that time he had a certain comfort level with me and my judgment. There were things that would come up, because almost every night while I was on the staff in the so-called "bag" there'd be the usual, "Paul, see me—" note so that after I left he'd have a chance to wrap up and go through whatever it was he was concerned about, and he'd call to check in for my opinion on the matter. Certainly we were in touch plenty.

Martin: This is interesting because at some point it seems as though you transition from being a Kennedy employee to a family friend, or a friend of his. Did you see yourself after, say, the '77 period or through 1980, as his friend? Did that develop while you worked for him?

Kirk: I can't speak for him. I always felt that after a certain point this was more than just boss and staffer, that there was a friendship that just evolved. I could be mixed up on the calendar, but I know there were times we'd go out and play tennis or go to the pool at McLean and different things. So the friendship was sort of a—this is something that happens, it grows. I'd be invited to different things that might be a little out of the ordinary for a staffer to be invited to.

And then—I'm jumping ahead now, but there are certain things about Senator Kennedy. He has traditions that he holds on to. We have an annual August dinner here at our home that's been going on since maybe the mid-'70s where the [David and Trixie] Burkes and the [Eddie and Marge] Martins and the Kirks and the [Edward and Victoria Reggie] Kennedys get together. It's always something he plans for. You get a call sometime in February, "I'm going to be free from August 27th—" you know. He wanted to be sure that event was on the calendar. Then every fall, prior to a Harvard football game, depending on who's playing at home, we'd go to Saraceno's in the North End. John Culver and his wife; Jeff Coolidge, who passed away last year, who was on their team—John Culver played the same time Kennedy did—Dick Clasby and Mary Jo Gargan [Clasby], Dick's wife; Billy Cleary and my sister; Gail and myself; Claude Hooton and Maria [Hooten].

Then there's a tailgate the next day. You sort of have these visions of Ted Kennedy at different situations. The last couple of years the Harvard band has gone by and they've asked him to conduct the band. It's like, you see this guy, he's got the white hair and showing his age, and honest to God, I look around and I see Claude and a couple of these guys getting misty-eyed as they watch their pal. The band is like, "Oh, my God, it's Ted Kennedy!" On the family side, his other tradition is the Thanksgiving Day sail. There are certain things in his annual calendar that are locked. They're going to happen as long as he's around. He treasures those kinds of things.

So the friendship has progressed from just the staffing position; he's been my client, I've been his trustee on different family things. Then the chairmanship of the JFK Library Foundation was something that came up basically when Steve Smith was dying. He came into my office when I'd come back after the National Democratic Party chairmanship and asked me if I would take on the JFK Library Foundation chairmanship. I said, "Steve, the last thing I want to do is come back here to Boston and raise money. I had to do that for the Democratic National Committee, and I just did not enjoy it." But this was almost as close as it could be to a deathbed request. I'm looking at Steve; he was near the end of his life. So first of all, I was mindful of John Kennedy and why I got involved in politics in the first place, and what an honor it would be. This is another one of those things, you're thinking to yourself, *Okay, I'll do it for two years*—and I'm still doing it all these years later.

Anyway, that's a long and probably not a fully responsive answer. But you know, friendships, like your own friendships and experiences, they evolve. It's been a very valued relationship, not just because of his prominence in national life, but just as a human being whom I love and respect and whom I'm glad to have as a pal.

Martin: Your experience is interesting because many people who have worked on Capitol Hill, and many Senators, many members of Congress, tend to keep their staff at quite a distance from themselves personally. It seems as though, from what you're describing, that wasn't the case

with Kennedy, or at least it wasn't the case with you. Do you think that your case is unique for him or is that the way he deals with staff?

Kirk: I was going to give you another example, but it's not the same, because they were colleagues in school. John Culver was on the staff for a while, but that's a whole different thing. Maybe mine is somewhat unique, although Eddie Martin was a guy I think the Senator considers a close friend, perhaps Dave Burke. But it's maybe in part because of my legal background. On his divorce, and trusts, and other issues, the combination of the professional background together with the sense of understanding and loyalty, and the sense of confidence in the confidentiality. These matters are not going to be table talk, much less public talk. Then, hopefully, he thought this guy has his head screwed on right and he's going to think clearly about some of these issues. So maybe those are a different cluster of factors that keep us in touch more closely.

Gail has been away the past week because her brother is being operated on, he's all alone down in Naples so she went down, and over the week the Senator and Vicki must have called four times, "Come over and have dinner," just because they knew I was here alone. So that's an example of just how thoughtful he is and how thoughtful they are generally. I guess he's very comfortable with me around and we laugh and—so maybe I'm not the right person to be responding to that question. But, in terms of my own life, and somebody impacting it as a friend, and my own experience, he's as important a figure as there could be. First of all, seven years of my career was as a part of his office, and then the rest of the story is in that context. Part of it, an important part, is that there's a treasured friendship at the base of it. It probably didn't start that way, but happily, that's where it is today.

Knott: Can you tell us how you enlisted for the 1980 Presidential campaign? You were practicing law again, you'd only been out a year or two, and all of a sudden the talk comes up that he may be challenging President [Jimmy] Carter.

Kirk: I think there was an honest-to-God draft that started. There must have been a lot of people who were disappointed about '76, when young Teddy was ill and his father had all these other personal factors. And with respect to the other issues, I think the security issue was always in everybody's mind. But the draft started with people in different states talking to each other and putting a little fuel on it. Mark Siegel, a guy who was in Washington, used to work at the Democratic National Committee and knew a lot of the players around. He was sort of ginning things up. Anyway, the draft basically did take on a life of its own. I think the Senator probably wanted to disavow all this and distance himself, but at the same time, I think there was an interest in seeing, *well, what's going on here*.

So they said, "Maybe Paul will help—" keep the book. So just as you say, I never did get that far away. A lot of people would call and take my temperature, see what was going on, and so forth. I basically didn't discourage, and I didn't do a lot to encourage. I just said, "If you want to mark time, mark time." I think Siegel and a couple of other guys wanted more time to keep a file, and keep the names, and the rest of it. Then I think what really happened—I was against Senator Kennedy running in 1980.

Knott: You were?

Kirk: Yes, I thought it was a bad idea.

Knott: Why was that?

Kirk: It wasn't that if he didn't run this time there wouldn't be another opportunity. The Senator had passed on '76. But I always felt that the time for a Kennedy to run was not the way Robert Kennedy did it in '68, but to run when the seat is open. Then you could pull the party together on your own because of what you did in your own campaign, and then take on the Republican nominee. But to take on an incumbent President is an enormous responsibility and a very tough challenge in any event. I just thought that with all of that, it was not the time to go. But things moved along.

Basically I think what spurred it on was that all the things that the Kennedys, now Ted Kennedy particularly, stood for, were being abrogated by the incumbent. You had the misery index, you had the interest rates, you had inflation, you had a non-energy situation, you had the Iran hostage crisis. You had a sense, if not spoken outright by Carter or his people, that this job is too big for anyone. You had the whole malaise attitude. It was counter to everything that any real Democrat, or certainly any Kennedy, believed in. If anybody believed in the politics of hope, and opportunity, and challenge, and *we could do better* it was the Kennedys. It was why they got involved, and had stayed involved. This whole Carter message was counter to all of that. It was enormously frustrating to Senator Kennedy. Plus, as much as anything else, the fact that there was not any love lost between him and President Carter, this sort of got the juices running.

And the polls were showing pretty good support. No internal polls, because we didn't have any, but the public polls and what you'd get from conversations and opinions.

Knott: He had fellow Senators urging him to run.

Kirk: Yes, this was thought to be a doable situation. So things moved forward. I don't have to tell you, it was brutal. First of all, the challenges came pretty early because you had Iowa and New Hampshire. The campaign was not really well structured . If you had to do it over again, and you knew you were really going to plan a campaign, this would not be the way to go. It was a jump off and a hope to get a couple of quick wins and then "moving on up." Of course, that didn't happen. We had this former Cadillac dealership down on 22nd Street in D.C. that was the campaign headquarters. I don't think it's there any more. Guys came in, and we worked out of plywood office structures. I had this little cubicle; it didn't span from here to the chimney and no windows. The map is up there and—it got to the point where I dreaded Tuesdays, because it was Jesus, here we go again. How are we going to explain that we lost another one? It was brutal.

Everything that you might have anticipated came back tenfold. There was Chappaquiddick and every goddamn thing. Ninety percent of the time campaigns are crisis management, but this was constant. We were in the bunker from the beginning. The poor candidate was out working hard, and he wasn't having a good time either. You have to understand, he never got space and serious coverage because of other news. The news was dominated by the Iran-Contra thing, the hostage crisis. The Carter approach was perfect because they didn't have to go out and engage. They used a "Rose Garden" strategy because of this enormous crisis. So you had no megaphone on the Kennedy side and you had all this other crisis news on the other side. If Kennedy got on the news

it was because he said "fam farmily" rather than "farm family," and they'd talk about how he screwed up the syntax. Please, spare us.

Then in the meantime we're getting drubbed, I mean, we're getting drubbed like two to one in caucuses. So any sense that there might be an early liftoff was gone. And you're working against a White House that is using every bit of apparatus they can possibly use. The grants are going out to the mayors and they're getting locked in. The mayor is saying, "I've got to be for Carter. I just got $400,000 in block grants. What the hell am I going to do?" So you've got all this apparatus coming at you and nothing at an early stage in the win-loss column to give you anything to feel good about. So it was punishing for everybody, and money is drying up. We've got no budget, we've got no money, and we're trying to do this piecemeal media strategy. It was not a lot of fun.

Then you get to the point—the rationale for getting in that I mentioned has never been articulated because you can't get the coverage. You reminded me about the Georgetown speech, and that was going back to the core rationale, if you will, of feeling he needed to say it again to get some attention. So that worked for a little while; then events took over again. Then you get to the middle of the campaign and the arguments became, "Where we began was sincere and real, and we are going nowhere. Working people in this country are taking it right in the chops. There's no response from the White House to help them. Nobody is making a case for these people." So how do we get a dialogue going? And can we get a debate with Carter ?

That basically became the second rationale for the campaign. Even if we're not going to win, we can't just fold up and go away without finally letting the national audience know why we're here in the first place, right? So then, how were we going to get Carter in a debate—

Knott: What was your take on that, on whether the debate was a legitimate—?

Kirk: My take was yes, this is irresponsible that we have no Administration policy, no serious dialogue except a wringing of the hands about woe is me, and oh, this is so tough. So is life! So for me it was, this is not a good deal. A debate would be important, win or lose, at least you have a platform. But that wasn't going to happen. So gradually—there were some wins along the way. I will say that when it came to New York—I had spoken to the Senator and to Eddie Martin and said, "Look, this is crazy. If we don't win New York we have to get out of this thing." He agreed. So we hired a room at the Parker House in Boston. I think Barbara Souliotis went to the point of chartering a plane to fly us to Boston after a New York loss. I had the script written—

Knott: The concession speech?

Kirk: Yes, this is the exit strategy. I thought, *Thank God, we're out of here!* Wrong. So of course then you had this UN [United Nations] issue about how the U.S. voted in the UN on settlements in Israel, and of course, the Jewish community went nuts. New York, with its large Jewish constituency, said basically that Carter was selling them out. That, plus whatever other reasons, the Senator wins New York and here we go again, right? So we're off and going. I think down the line he wins Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Then the next situation occurs after California and we don't have the delegates to win the nomination and, of course, the enormous pressure to get out.

Knott: Did you ever think there was a point where it was destructive to the party for the Senator to stay in?

Kirk: Yes. First of all, I thought if we didn't win New York, this is crazy. Then at the end, at California, I thought, this doesn't make any sense, and I argued to get out. So back to the earlier point, you're going against an incumbent President who is on his way to win the convention. But, having said that, now I can look back and think maybe they were right, I don't know, because Senator Kennedy never had an opportunity to explain what it was that inspired him to run. The whole campaign had been muffled except for the fact that there had been more losses than wins. Then there was a lot of pressure from the party establishment. Obviously, Tip was going to chair the convention and there were a lot of different things along the way. I remember asking Party Chairman John White to resign because he hadn't been neutral. They were doing all the things that I suppose you'd normally do to say, "This is over."

The thing that I think really had some justification to it was this whole rules fight. So a combination of things happened. One of them was—this was a negotiating tactic—we had some 20 minority planks in the platform, all of which related to health insurance and energy and wage and price controls, and all the different things that would impact upon working America. The key rules question was an innovation of the Carter people. They wanted to be sure that the delegates who had voted, for instance, in Iowa back in January, were still bound when they came to New York in August. The Kennedy people were making the opposite argument—that the highest convening body in authority in the Democratic Party is its national convention. It ought to be deliberative, it ought to be current, it ought to be topical, it ought to be timely. To think that the situation is the same in August as when the guy in Davenport voted in January is nonsense. So we're going to oppose the Carter rule and argue that delegates ought to be free to vote for the guy they had in January if they want, but if they want to be free and open-minded, they can vote in August as they think the circumstances in August dictate.

In the meantime, I'd been visited by Edward Bennett Williams and some of the folks who were for an "open" convention. They were pushing for, "Let everybody release their delegates and we'll get rid of Carter, we'll get rid of Kennedy, and we'll nominate somebody else." So you had all this intrigue going on. We were headquartered at the Waldorf Astoria. I had had a lot of conversations with Dick Moe, whom I had known from Senate days. Then when it came time for New York, I remember the girls in our staff had this big, big suite. They had made a dormitory room. They had to vacate that so Hamilton Jordan and I could spend two days negotiating and hammering out this agreement, some sort of a peace agreement, with Tip calling in and all. It was wild. In any event, we make a compromise on the platform after we lost the rule battle.

I'll never forget this, in terms of what happens to people's juices in a campaign. When I made the deal on the platform, you would think I was Benedict Arnold. I walked into this room where the Kennedy folks were working—this was like a war room—where the guys were working the delegates. To a person, man and woman, by now they are in this until the scorched earth. They don't give a goddamn about the party or anything else. They are going forward. So it collapsed their whole game plan. You would think I sold Ted Kennedy down the river. It was like, *You took all the fun out of the fair*. It was a painful, crazy time.

Then the Senator withdrew, and we went through this crazy game—will he raise Carter's hand in victory or not raise his hand. I can remember going down in the car with him. There wasn't any talk about it. It was just let's just get this thing over with. He went in. They went up on the podium and I was thinking, *He's not going to do it*. And, of course, he didn't. Maybe even to this day, he still harbors some resentment toward President Carter, who while he didn't have to be true to the Kennedy ideals, wasn't even close to their spirit. They are all about hope, and they are all about confidence, and they are all about opportunity, and it means they have to challenge, the best instincts of the American people, but we have got to get there. So that rubbed the wrong way, and then, obviously, there were a lot of things said in the campaign.

Knott: Carter said he was going to "whip his ass."

Kirk: Then there was one point, I remember [Walter] Mondale questioned Kennedy's patriotism. It was like, whoa! This is from a former colleague? Things were not fun. They were getting really bad, maybe on both sides. So that was that. You can drill down on that as far as you want, but—

Knott: Do you think his heart was in it, Paul? We've had some people tell us they weren't sure whether Senator Kennedy really wanted this or whether he was sort of almost fulfilling an obligation that was expected of him, that he'd have to run for President some day. I know I'm asking you to speculate.

Kirk: Yes, that's a question for him. What do I think? I think this—that he is a pragmatic politician, in the very best sense of the word. I would say that I subscribe somewhat to what you're suggesting in your question because if I were Ted Kennedy and knew that this was the one—my first opportunity, maybe my last, to run for President—I believe I would have planned it differently. This was undertaken without having taken a poll, just going from a draft movement to a campaign, and that whole transition is by definition sloppy. Then sort of putting a structure together with a campaign, and you're getting into it late, and you have an incumbent President. So from that point of view, I would say maybe that's right. Now once he's in it, he's got competitive juices just like we do, maybe more so. So once he's in it, it was, "We're going to do this." So I would say, there may have been some of that now that we're in it, we'll give it all we've got!

Martin: Do you remember what the early sense about Carter's re-electability was within the campaign, had Kennedy not jumped in? Were there discussions about whether Carter was going to lose anyway in 1980?

Kirk: I think there was a real sense that Carter was in trouble. I think to this day if you ask Rosalynn Carter why Jimmy Carter lost against Ronald Reagan, she'd blame Ted Kennedy. Having said that, I'm not sure that's true at all. It probably didn't help him. So that was a factor. But I think the early public polls probably indicated no good news for Carter in the end anyway.

Knott: Do you recall at all if he was surprised by the Reagan victory that fall? The Carter folks were—for a while they were hoping to run against Reagan, they thought he'd be an easy mark. I'm wondering if you have any recollections about what the Senator's take was as that election approached. Did he see Reagan as a formidable candidate or somebody who—

Kirk: I think, yes, over the course of time. Obviously, you could see the gifts that Reagan had. Just the skill with which he was able to communicate dispelled a lot of early stuff about he's just an old actor. He did very well. The other thing was, he looked at the office the way a Kennedy might look at the office. He looked at that as if we're supposed to lift people up, for Christ's sake, that's what this job is about. This was before "Morning in America" and all that, but nevertheless, this guy was coming at it with a positive, uplifting point of view.

So I assume there was some of that. You could see it kind of evolve through the campaign. But that's more through my eyes, I think, than Ted's.

Knott: Paul, do you have anything else from the '80 campaign?

Martin: No.

Kirk: Good, thank God!

Knott: I take it that it was one of the worst experiences of your life, is that an accurate—

Kirk: I would say yes. The chairmanship was another experience, but this, this is related to another person that you care about. If you're going through something that's tough, you say, "I can deal with it," but if it's somebody else's name and reputation and legacy that's at stake, and you're a part of it and it's going bad, it's in some ways a little harder. The internals of that campaign were tough, too.

Knott: We've heard some talk about that. Steve Smith was essentially the head of the campaign, is that correct?

Kirk: Yes.

Knott: Was he ever able to get a handle on that organization? Were there clear lines of command?

Kirk: No. That's what I mean by structure, there wasn't the kind of structure where you'd say, "Here's the way it's going to work." Everything was sort of necessarily grab-ass, if you will, because we didn't have a media guy, we didn't have a media plan, we were raising money, it was coming in one door, going out the other. It's remarkable, frankly, that we did as well as we did.

Joe Crangle, who was a New York, Erie County, guy, had been chairman of Erie County and he came in—he had been with Bobby. Steve Smith either brought him down or he volunteered. At one point in the campaign somebody thought it would be better if I travelled with the candidate. So I said, "We'll try it." So I went out on the road. Gail, my wife, was working at the headquarters—we look back on this and laugh—Joe took over my office, but it was just for a day because Gail said, "Get out of here. Paul's not going to be out there forever. He's going to come back and he's going to want his desk." So they had a big blowout. There's a whole other story about that, but I'll just finish this part of the story.

Now you fast forward, it's 1985 and I'm running for chairman. The entire New York delegation, at the instruction of Mario Cuomo, was for someone else, except Joe Crangle. Joe Crangle ended

up being for me. So the day that I was elected chairman, Joe Crangle and Gail meet, the first time they've seen each other since the Kennedy headquarters, and they hug each other and both cry—dissolve in tears. Gail, because she's saying, "After all the crap, Joe Crangle stood up for Paul, against the Governor, against the entire delegation." And Joe was just like, "Redemption!" Anyway, those are the little things that happen in the middle of a campaign. Steve did everything he could but it was brutal for him, too.

Knott: Was it partly the similar problem that there were some JFK people, there were some RFK people, there were some EMK people, or was it different?

Kirk: Not so much that, it wasn't so much that. There was a generational sort of divide, Steve being the senior guy. There were all these young people who were new to him, and a lot of the young guys were further advanced in the knowledge of delegate counts and rules and credentials and all that stuff. I don't remember the Senator having a lot to do with who staffed what, so it was all sort of cherry picking, and difficult, almost impossible for Steve. That's enough of '80.

Martin: Now that you've stayed on it long enough for me to think back—

Knott: Can you take one more?

Kirk: One more question and no more answers.

Martin: The negotiations on the platform. You said it was a two-day affair. I was hoping you could maybe delve into that a little more, in terms of Carter's—what did they want out of the negotiations.

Kirk: I can understand this. I understood it then, I understand it more now. You had, in 1972, George McGovern accepting the nomination at two in the morning. The worst thing a party chairman can do is miss an opportunity to deliver a national message on prime time to a national audience. Secondly, to permit a blood bath on the floor of the convention demonstrating a lack of party unity. The press love conflict, of course. If you have unity, that's not news. But from the party's point of view, this is what you want, you want everything by the numbers, and you want to have everything locked in so that come prime time, it's your nominee's moment and it's unity and harmony and peace and music and "we have what it takes to govern."

That's what the Carter campaign wanted. We knew that's what they wanted. So the bargaining was, let's make sure they don't get the unity and harmony until they agree on the more important things. One of the more important things clearly was the rule issue, because that was the kid's last fight. And the negotiations were as much about timing as they were about substance for Carter. But from the Kennedy point of view, you had an opportunity to get your substance in, boiled down from, say, 20, to four platform planks that the Carter people ultimately subscribed to and bought into. So that was our big win. We got some win on substance in the Democratic platform.

I think the other issue was at what point in the convention this rules vote would take place. They wanted it as early as possible, probably like in the afternoon, so it would be out of prime time, all done by the time the TV lights come up. Nobody would even know that there was a rules contest. So that was another issue. Frankly, I don't quite remember at what time that was resolved. It had

to do with their need to have a tidy, unified convention. The vote took place, we took a drubbing, and that was basically it. Is that helpful?

Martin: It is. I'm curious about what expectations the Kennedy campaign had, in terms of—had the procedural vote gone your way, did you have any evidence that people would switch, or was this just hope?

Kirk: I don't know that we had evidence sufficient to say there would be a definite win, but there was certainly evidence that even people who had been hand-picked by Carter, let alone those who had simply voted somewhere along the line, were very uncomfortable. They understood the intellectual, rational idea that it's been nine months, the circumstances have changed, and have gotten worse. They're thinking, Carter as nominee may be heading south and we're going to have the Republicans take over the White House. So what is our responsibility? So that was a real dilemma for a lot of them. I couldn't say I remember a hard count that said as soon as we win the rules contest, the whole thing goes to Kennedy.

In the meantime, as I mentioned before, there were a couple of aspirants in the wings hoping that everything would open up and that there would be two or three favorite sons and the whole dynamic would change. Maybe it would be [Edmund] Muskie, maybe it would be [Henry] Jackson. So all of that was in play. But the rules contest was going to be make or break, one way or the other.

Martin: How happy was the campaign with getting those four planks? Were there other planks that you wanted but just couldn't negotiate into the agreement?

Kirk: I think from a substantive point of view, the campaign was happy. The guys in the trenches that I mentioned were miserable, because they were going to lose their opportunity to screw Carter and screw John White and said, "We don't care if we're here until March!" They were zealots, almost deranged—it was like, "Hello! What is going on here? Are there any grownups?" It was tough. So that's it for '80.

Knott: That's it for '80, we'll let you off the hook. So you go on to become treasurer and then chairman of the Democratic Party.

Kirk: Then I went back to the law firm and Charlie Curry resigns as treasurer, and Chuck Manatt, who was then chairman, asked if I would serve. So I accepted. My law partners must have been thinking, *There he goes again*. Now we go to the '84 convention in San Francisco. Mondale's folks, in Chuck Manatt's home town on the eve of the convention, decide they want to dump Manatt. Bert Lance is going to be the chairman, of course.

Knott: Strange choice.

Kirk: It was mindless stuff. I remember meeting Mike Berman, who worked for Mondale, in one of Mondale's hotel suites. For privacy, we met in a bathroom of all places. I said, "Hey Mike, this is crazy. I'm not speaking for Chuck, I'm just saying, in his own hometown, on the eve of the convention, you're trying to roll this guy? What is it? This is nuts. I'm out, this is a whole—" And he said, "No, we're—"

Knott: You would get out if that's what happened.

Kirk: Yes, I said, "What is—" He said, "Oh no, no. We want you to stay as treasurer," and so forth. As it turned out, Chuck stayed and finished his term.

So then the Reagan campaign is what really gave me the germ to run. I watched Reagan talk about John Kennedy. This is a guy who, in that campaign, invoked the name of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, Scoop Jackson—the Reagan Democrats. He just took the flag, he took everything. I was like, "Huh? This is crazy." He drubbed Mondale forty-nine to one basically, without a fight. What happened was that Gary Hart and John Glenn ran against Mondale in the primaries. Mondale went for the early knockout strategy. His strategy was to get all the interest groups to endorse, get everybody to endorse, and I'll be the winner. So Hart and Glenn turned that around on him and called him the special interest candidate. Then when the convention is over and Mondale is the nominee. Reagan grabs that line and drives it at Mondale. Of course, Mondale helped feed that. Do you remember his Vice Presidential selection process?

Knott: No.

Kirk: There's one picture, at the end of his driveway he had an Hispanic, an African-American, a couple of women, he put on display all the little slices of demography. So anyway, the long and short of it is, the Democrats became the party of special interests, not the special interests we remember—big corporate money with special interests—well, now special interests are labor, are women, are all of that.

So there were some staffers at the National Committee who came to me and said, "Would you ever think of running for chairman?" I thought about it, and I thought, this is nuts, particularly after this campaign, but I was so angry at what Reagan had done. I said, "You know, there's a time when you have something to say, and know why you want to say it, and you should use that platform. Whatever happens, maybe the party will at least hear something of what I have to say." So I got into the race. It became much more intense than I thought. It became, basically, "anybody but Kirk."

It was predictable in a sense, because the last thing the South wanted after losing 49 to 1 was a guy who they perceived to be a Kennedy liberal from Massachusetts. "We just had Mondale, give us a break," right? So my candidacy was going nowhere with the guys from the South. And in New York, I went to see Mario Cuomo, same thing. He said, "Look, the last thing we need is somebody with the same zip code as Tip O'Neill or Ted Kennedy. This party needs a woman from the West, and I'm for Nancy Pelosi." But in terms of the talk about Terry Sanford as chairman, he said, "That's going back to the stone age." So in the race were Nancy Pelosi, myself, Sharon Pratt Dixon [Kelly], who went on to become the mayor of D.C., Terry Sanford, Bob Keefe—

Knott: Did we have a Duane Garrett?

Kirk: Duane Garrett, yes.

Knott: And former Representative John Cavanaugh?

Kirk: Yes, John Cavanaugh. So you had a big group. Basically it came down to Pelosi and Kirk, until it looked like Pelosi couldn't make it. Then what happened was that New York—interesting that Mario Cuomo had said, "Terry Sanford is going back to the stone age"—New York made a deal that if Nancy got out, then New York and the South and all the rest of them would be with Terry Sanford. But even with that opposition I ended up winning the chairmanship, for better or worse.

One of the things that I had promised and then undertook to do was to move some furniture around in the Democratic Party. Since the South was absolutely locked against me, I figured the first thing I had to do was set out to build some bridges. So a couple of weeks into it I called a meeting in Atlanta of all the national committee members, state chairs, and elected officials from the South. Two days, just let them bitch. I knew what message was coming because it was where I was coming from anyway. What was going on in the national party was that people in the South were running against the national party in order to win at home. The party platform was all over the lot, and just culturally they couldn't live with it.

Then here's a story about Carter. Now I'm two weeks into the chairmanship, I'm in President Carter's home state, he's the last Democratic President, I'm the new Democratic chairman. I thought, *I can't leave his state without paying my respects to him. I've got to go do this*. So I get this little plane, it's just the pilot and myself; we're flying from Atlanta down to Plains, Georgia. It was amazing, I remember vividly, I'm in the plane looking down, seeing the red clay, tobacco farms, and thinking to myself, *Wow, this is an amazing country, that this guy, from this little hamlet in south Georgia, to the Governorship to the Presidency of the United States*. I had seen him as Governor before—this is another part of the story leading up to '80 I guess, the time when Kennedy and Carter were at some Bar Association meeting. We can go back to that if you're interested in it.

So I fly down to Plains, Georgia. They have a simple little bungalow. For 45 minutes to an hour, I'm in a chair here and he's on the couch and Mrs. Carter is there. You know, they used to call her "the steel magnolia." You can imagine how she felt. All the time I was there I kept thinking to myself that she is saying to herself, "This is the guy who managed the Kennedy campaign that cost my husband the Presidency." I could just feel it. But he and I held a serious conversation, and I basically told him why I thought the party is where it is, and some of the things we have to do at the committee, and about its image, and all the rest of it. He's very nice and very cordial and decent. I said, "Well, all the press are outside, they're waiting for us to come out." But the long and short of it is, he was as decent and as civil in public with the press as he was during our private conversation. He seems to harbor no ill will and when you think about what had gone on, it just was remarkable.

The other interesting thing, that was a Saturday and I flew back to Washington. Monday morning, I go into the chairman's office, it's first thing in the morning. The phone rings and it's Bert Lance. "Mr. Chairman, it's Bert." "Hey, Bert, how are you?" He said, "I just thought I'd start your week off on a good foot." I said, "What happened?" He said, "You passed the Rosalynn test." "I passed the Rosalynn test?" So whatever it was, there was some feedback between Bert Lance and the Carters, and somehow or other Mrs. Carter had gotten over the resentment, and apparently I made a favorable impression. The importance of all of that is just to point out all the things one has to do as party chairman to work for harmony and unity. Bert

Lance and all the southern chairs who opposed my candidacy became my number one cheerleaders at the end.

In pursuing the chairmanship, I had very little conversation, if any, with Ted Kennedy. I suspect he was thinking, *I'm going to stay below the radar. Paul thinks he can do this thing, good luck to him, but the more identity his candidacy has with me, the less chance he's going to have*. Of course, he was right. That was like the big tattoo—the Kennedy label. But one thing led to another in the campaign for the chairmanship and it just happened to come together. But that was the impression I had to overcome. I never denied my Kennedy allegiance, and I never—

Martin: Pelosi ran very strongly on that platform.

Kirk: Yes. You know, a funny thing about it, I used to kid afterwards, Nancy Pelosi goes on to great heights in the Congress, Terry Sanford goes to the Senate, Sharon Dixon becomes mayor of D.C., and I get stuck with the chairmanship. What kind of a deal was this?

There were good things about it. At the end I was asked to stay on. I thought to myself, I don't need to do this over again, but this was a good thing to have done. Tip O'Neill invited me to every Thursday morning whip meeting so I'd be in synch with the thinking and strategies of the Congress. We accomplished some good things. We inherited a significant debt but left a surplus; we won the Senate majority back in 1986; and in '88, we left the Atlanta convention with [Michael] Dukakis ahead by 17 points. I look back and I wonder, really, whether he wanted to win.

Knott: I see.

Kirk: Because after the convention, he came back and basically disappeared. In politics, you can't create a vacuum for a minute.

Knott: He was getting hammered during that time.

Kirk: I always thought that he won the nomination—he was an excellent Governor and terrific guy—but he won the nomination because he was able to sustain his primary campaign. Bob Farmer and the finance folks were able to raise the money and get through the primaries, and then pretty soon he was nominated. I don't know whether it was about Kitty's [Katharine Dukakis] issues or what, but I always thought to myself something's missing here, something's missing. I thought he had an enormous opportunity to win and it just didn't happen.

Knott: You went on—when did you leave the DNC [Democratic National Committee]?

Kirk: Eighty-nine.

Knott: You considered briefly a possible run for Governor of Massachusetts.

Kirk: Yes.

Knott: How serious were you?

Kirk: The thing that really dissuaded me was that there was a time of really serious budget shortfall and I—as I mentioned earlier, when I was a kid I always thought that this might be something I'd want to do. Not necessarily Governor, but perhaps Congress. Then there was a period of time where the amount of money you needed to raise was discouraging. Then there was some interest expressed as I was coming back after the chairmanship, about the Governorship. It was a short window of thinking about it, but what really led me to conclude that it didn't make any sense was that if I were to be Governor, I wanted to be somebody who could build something and do something instead of dealing with cut-backs and pain—it would have been more surgery than construction. And the budget shortfall was such that I thought, this isn't what I really want to do. So I didn't.

In the meantime, there were two other things of interest that I would have done, neither of which happened. I was on the short list for commissioner of football and later baseball.

Knott: Really?

Kirk: The football one was in large part because of a fellow by the name of Joe Robbie, who owned the Florida team for a while. Actually, he was a pal of Ted Kennedy's and had helped him. When I was running for the chairmanship, a couple of times he called up and said, "I'm going to be flying from here to there, I'm going to be in Washington, then I'm going to Colorado. Do you have to do anything in Colorado?" So a couple of times I'd take a hop with him and go out and talk to the Colorado delegation for example. So he became a good friend. Then when Pete Rozelle died, Joe was saying, "What about this?" I said, "If you want to put my name on the list, that's fine." So I did have some interest. Paul Tagliabue was selected commissioner and has done a great job. Paul and I and this fellow, Tom Williams, whose picture I showed you, had worked together when Paul was at Covington & Burling.

And then on the baseball one, when I was getting through on the chairmanship, Joan Kroc, Ray Kroc's widow, she—this is not so much related to the Kennedy thing—

Knott: That's fine.

Kirk: The rap they put on me when I became chairman was, "Couldn't raise his hat," you know, "He won't raise any money." Raising money is not something I wanted to do. I'm one of those guys who get embarrassed when you have to pass the box at church, let alone call up and ask for big bucks. But in any event, as we got into the chairmanship, we had this victory fund. We were raising pretty good money just as a general matter, but the victory fund was pointing toward the convention. It was sort of the first of the so-called soft money, which has now become abused beyond recognition. But I had my staff prepare call lists and I put aside 30 minutes every afternoon for the phone. I hated it.

So I put a call once to Joan Kroc. About two days later she called back. I took her call, of course. We started talking about the party and the issues and so forth, and I started to explain to her about the victory fund and the limits, how she could only give a certain amount. She said, "I thought I was prohibited from—" I said, "You are, this is non-federal money. It's for voter registration, get out the vote, that kind of thing, not for direct political campaigning." She said to me, "Would a million dollars be helpful to you?" I said, "Where are you right now?" She said,

"I'm on a boat off Nantucket. I know it would be helpful to you. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to call my lawyer. She's going to ask you whether this is a gift and some tax-related and legal questions about it. Then we'll proceed from there."

The long and short of it is, in a few weeks a check for a million dollars arrives. I called her and said, "First of all, I can't thank you enough for your interest in the party. But we need to be careful about how this story is told. I want to be sure it's told in a way that you understand, because a check of this size, this is the biggest check that's ever come to the National Committee, that I know of." So we worked all that out. It put an end to the notion of "Kirk couldn't raise his hat," number one.

But then as I was getting to the end of the chairmanship, one day she called, as she had become a casual friend. She said, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "I don't know. I understand that [Charles] Chub Feeney's job is open. He's the president of the National League. And since your club, San Diego, is in the National League, maybe you could think about me replacing Feeney." "Oh, I didn't know you were interested in baseball." I said, "Yes." She said, "How would you like to be president of the San Diego team?" *San Diego?!* She said, "Before we talk about the National League, the president of the San Diego Padres is open." Then she explained that her daughter and her daughter's husband, who was the Padres' president at the time, were getting divorced. So anyway, she set up the interview with the search firm and then I flew out to San Diego and had a meeting.

It turned out that basically what they wanted was somebody to be the ambassador to the community and the job wouldn't have much to do with baseball. And I wasn't really interested in moving 3,000 miles. Then she put me on a helicopter and I flew up the coast to give a speech. It was one of those fascinating things. Then what happened was that after the baseball owners fired [Francis] Fay Vincent, and they conducted this bogus search for an independent commissioner, and [Allan] Bud Selig, who owned the Milwaukee Braves, was named commissioner. It was all a sham. Anyway, my name had been actively mentioned, but that didn't happen either. But those were of more interest to me than the Governorship, because of the budgetary reason I mentioned. I might have really seriously considered the Governorship if there had been some resources to build something and leave a legacy other than cutting services.

Knott: As the '94 campaign approached and the Senator was supposedly in some political difficulty at home, partly as a result of the Willie Smith trial, could you tell us a little bit about what role, if any, you played in that campaign, and was he seriously in trouble? I'm getting some mixed signals on that from folks as to whether the [Mitt] Romney threat was real.

Kirk: The Romney threat was a real threat.

Knott: It was.

Kirk: We're talking, what is it, 38 years in the Senate?

Knott: In '94, I believe it was 32 years.

Kirk: You had Romney coming off the Olympics, and all kinds of money, attractive figure, well spoken—a real opportunity for the Republicans, certainly not a candidate that anyone would take

for granted as being easy. And by all odds, probably the most attractive candidate that Kennedy had faced in his Senate career. Even in Massachusetts from time to time, people might ask how much Kennedy is enough? You know, when is it time for a change?

Knott: Was there a feeling perhaps that he was out of touch, that Senator Kennedy had gotten out of touch with the state?

Kirk: I don't think that's ever happened, to tell you the truth. He pays a lot of attention. It's just something you have to be watchful for all the time. So here comes this young, attractive guy, who's got a gazillion bucks and is going to be serious about it. He was going to make a real run, and he did make a real run. The thing was over after the debates took place, but there were two factors. One was the plant that Bain Capital had invested in. Then there was the strike or layoffs or some attitude of indifference by Romney to the workers of that plant. These workers got wind that Romney was a threat to Senator Kennedy, they made a tape for TV, and they came to Massachusetts. So the first signal that Romney had a problem was when this story was told. This was the first chink in Romney's shining armor.

The second was the debates. The Senator just got himself pumped. It was a knockout blow. He knew how serious it was. One little thing, the afternoon of the first debate—the [John F. Kennedy] Library is a very special place to him, for all the obvious reasons—I've heard of other people who've come to the library and feel it's almost like a religious experience—but he took his briefing book and went out on the water side of the library, just absorbing whatever inspiration he could invoke from his brother.

Knott: This was the day of the debate, preparing for the debate?

Kirk: Yes. It's hard to understand I suppose, but when you think about it, everything was at stake here, so whether he was looking for inspiration, or strength, or whatever—but his debate performance was masterful. All the juices were flowing. So my role on that was basically negotiating. By that time I was also chairman of the Commission on Presidential Debates, so I had had some experience about how those negotiations can work. The funny thing about it was, in discussion of negotiations about the debate, I remembered Mark Roosevelt and Bill Weld debating in Faneuil Hall. Mark was a little fellow and Weld was long and lanky and they used these small podiums. It was fine for Mark, but Bill Weld looked like he was standing behind an old third-grade desk with the little inkwells and stuff. He looked so awkward.

Now at this time Ted Kennedy was much bigger than he is today, so I thought, this is not going to be good if they see those podiums. So during the course of the negotiations, I said, "Let's take a look at the last debate at Faneuil Hall, just to see. Look at those small podiums—and Romney is tall. That's going to be awkward for both of them." So they said basically, "Whatever you want to do, you can get some bigger podiums." Marty Nolan wrote later, "So Kirk was able to get two condominium-size podiums and bring them in." [*laughter*] So that was another thing. We worked out the number, the timing, things like the podiums, the ground rules, and so forth.

But, in terms of seeing a candidate rise to the occasion, this was as good as Senator Kennedy had ever been. I think those two things, and principally the debate was the watershed that shut it down. People realized—

Knott: Was Vicki an important part of this?

Kirk: Vicki has been an important part of his life, clearly on the personal side, but on the public side, too. She's very smart. She's got those Louisiana political genes. So she is very much a part of all that.

Knott: I know there was at least one instance where she was hit with a question about the Senator's alleged womanizing. It may have even been in the context of the whole Palm Beach, Willie Smith thing, and she fired back with a response about the way she had seen him treat women and so forth. It seems to me that sort of neutralized that issue to some extent.

Kirk: Yes. But that will have been the toughest challenge he will have faced for sure.

Knott: Paul, what would you say to somebody who may be reading this transcript 50 years from now, in terms of trying to explain to them the hold that the Kennedy family, but in particular Ted Kennedy, has on particularly the voters of Massachusetts? What's the source of that? What's at the base of that? He was able to survive Chappaquiddick, he's been reelected with these massive margins. He doesn't even have an opponent for next year. What does it all come down to, if you were trying to explain this to somebody who may be a little distant from it?

Kirk: First of all, time is an important factor because over time people I think have understood, even if they disagree with this guy, a couple of things about him. He is so constant in the principles that he holds about public life and issues. They respect that. It's not, "Which way is the wind blowing? I'll flip around here, I've got to be for this because—" With this guy, there's a constancy about his political principles. While politics and politicians are demeaned, there's a certain value to Ted Kennedy's politics, and he also practices the politics of values, and they're values that people understand. You can go down the chronological list of accomplishments that he's done for Massachusetts. But the other thing is, back to what I said earlier, there's the element of his heart. And while after the Chappaquiddick thing people raised questions about his character, if you think about the issues and the causes that he cares about, and the values he espouses, those say a lot about the strength of his character.

I think, despite all the things you mentioned, over time people have understood that. And there is a segment, say it's 25 to 30 percent in Massachusetts, that wouldn't be for Jack Kennedy, wouldn't be for Bobby Kennedy, wouldn't be for Ted Kennedy, no matter what. There's another group that may disagree with his politics totally but say, "Hey listen, you know where this guy is coming from." That's important. The constancy, the integrity. There are principles to which he is constantly committed. Yet he knows how to get to yes, and to be a pragmatic compromiser, and not lose the fundamental principle. That's why, whether he's in the majority or in the minority in the United States Senate, this is a guy who can essentially control the agenda.

Clinton's agenda during the '90s and Bob Dole leaving the Senate to do something—I'm not exaggerating when I say it's because Ted Kennedy was steering the ship with his own agenda and bringing other people to it. So the Massachusetts thing, at this point, goes far beyond the name. And that other 61, 62 percent, by this time, would walk through fire for him. People say it's been one scandal after another, and there's been one heartache after another. And yet, even through all of that, the caring that he's able to sincerely exhibit, as much in his public life as in

his family or personal life—he can hear of an instance of some person's loss, or some sort of tragic thing, and he is on that thing big time. You had these folks from the Lockerbie plane crash; he's still visiting with them. He can't do anything for them, except to let them know that he's still there for them. Extraordinary kinds of outside things, reaching out. At this point in my life I'm convinced that it's not about politics. It's too consistent and he's too far along.

Knott: And it doesn't get a lot of publicity either, these are private acts.

Kirk: It's the kind of stuff that's below the radar. Then you wonder to yourself, again, just in terms of economizing a human being's time, you know, how does he find the time? But also the sense of real human need, somebody needs to hear from somebody who can empathize, and has been through it. All of that, people kind of feel it.

Then in terms of just the public servant side, it's heroic the kind of stuff he does. We have been—"we" meaning the people of the state—have been blessed. No exaggeration. Folks who are doing what you're doing, at the end of any kind of period of history will record that this is the most influential and accomplished United States Senator of all time. He's been blessed with the gift of years that were denied his brothers. How much that gift is something that drives him, I don't know. It's got to be part of it. You don't find many individuals who do as much or work as hard. Everything that they were unable to do, as the youngest son in the family perhaps he feels obliged to do. I'm speaking for myself; I am not trying to impose psychobabble on him. Sometimes it's the only way I can explain all the things that he does.

The other parallel is the attention he pays to the children who no longer have fathers. That's in his own family. That comes with being the heir, if you will, of this responsibility. There must be some of that on the public side that keeps him going and keeps him going at the pace he maintains. But, having said that, I think he is enormously fulfilled by it all, has to be, and understands the importance of this. He does have an enormous sense of history. I don't mean just family history, but history generally. So I think the work that you folks are doing to make this a permanent chapter for history is enormously important.

Martin: We do, too, thanks.

Knott: Is there anything else you'd like to add? Anything that we should have asked you that we didn't? It's always an unfair question.

Kirk: No, I think that as long as at the end of it—I don't mean the end of my conversation, but the really important part of this story that must be captured is Edward Kennedy the whole person, not just the Senator. To me, that's the remarkable aspect of his story. Outside the well of the Senate—that story in itself is a special story—the whole range of influence, influence of his love, influence of his caring. Things the ordinary person wouldn't think about another human being, or might be indifferent to, might just think, *Oh, they can take care of that themselves*. But of all people, he's always mindful and thoughtful about these things—that perhaps they cannot take care—that they need a helping hand. That's the important part of this; it's very important that you try to get that.

Knott: We are. There's definitely a large biographical element to this particular project.

Kirk: But I'll do as you suggested, if there are some other things that occur to me that might be of help, I'll let you know.

Knott: Please do. Thank you for your time and thank you for having us to your beautiful home.