EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL G. KIRK, JR.

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Interviewer

James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is an interview with Paul Kirk, June 20, at the Kennedy Library. Second interview. Thank you very much, Paul. This is my first with you.

Kirk: I know. I'm going to the big leagues. [*laughter*] I guess I'm fortunate in my relationship with Senator Kennedy in that I first, like most people in Massachusetts, was a constituent, and then, through a series of circumstances that I probably spelled out in my last interview, my next relationship with him was as a staffer, then as a campaign assistant or political director on a number of his campaigns. We traveled and worked closely together.

Then subsequently when I left his office—you never really leave his circle, but when I left his employ in the office—from time to time I served as his attorney, had some fun as his tennis partner, and in some matters presently serve as a trustee. So we've had, I think, an increasingly bonding friendship, which started just as a fellow who voted for him because I was inspired by his brother, whose name is on this building. A lot of things have unfolded.

The important thing that I would like to speak to is Senator Kennedy's strength of character. By that I mean the whole dimension of the man. I believe that he believes—and it probably comes from his religious faith—that the purpose of life is to live a life of purpose. I think that Senator Kennedy would find that in the Scriptures, and he was brought up in a family of deep religious faith who, without exception, have committed and did commit themselves to public service, and saw this was an avenue which, other than the clergy, was the most purposeful life one could live, particularly for one who was blessed with resources, blessed with education, and through the hard work of his forebears was given enormous opportunities to serve the public.

The other spiritual or gospel value that I have heard him refer to, to the degree it relates to a life of purpose and service, and when you think of the issues he's chosen to involve himself in in the Senate and through his career, is the passage "What you do for the least of these you do for me." I would say that's his strong beatitude. Then also the sense that, "To those whom much is given, much is expected." And so that combination of values—gospel values—messages that are there from Scripture through literature and the rest have, in their own way, described him. I think there's a faith dimension there that ties to a family obligation.

And, in addition, I would say this particularly. I don't know if I've ever met anyone who has a more generous spirit—a spirit of wanting to give and wanting to serve and wanting to help. That, I believe, is a dimension of his character, and it comes from something in his heart. It's been

consistent all the way through—the tremendous sense of empathy for you, for me, for people he meets, for people he's never met. It is, I think, the most important element that helps him select which issues to give priority. It's back to the life of purpose. "Why am I here? Why do I work so hard? Who am I doing this for? And if I do the best I can with this, isn't that what life's purpose is all about? I believe that a life of serious purpose is what life's journey's about."

There aren't many individuals who have suffered as much personal tragedy. But his resilience and his ability to bring comfort to people as one who's felt loss the way he has is a strength of his character. He has this unique quality to never forget to comfort others.

Every year, at least once a year—I have never been there, but I know it happens. Remember the Pan Am 103 flight in Lockerbie? Every year he has a meeting with the families of those lost, just so they will understand they are not forgotten—a remarkable thing, with all the other things on his plate. Some other examples of his personal compassion: Phil Hart, Michigan, conscience of the Senate, was there when Bobby [Kennedy] was there, when Ted was there, was there when I was there. Hart was stricken with cancer. Hart and Senator Kennedy became great friends. They served on the Judiciary Committee. For the period of Phil Hart's sickness, Senator Kennedy never went home without stopping at Phil Hart's home and bedside. This is what he did.

Then there was a gal, Paula Hadley, who worked on the Senator's staff. She lived in Sagamore or Sandwich or Bourne or somewhere on the way to the Cape. Again, she was stricken with cancer. He never went by her village on the way to or from the Cape without stopping and seeing her.

There's this other fellow whose name was Bob McDonough, who was Democratic state chairman of West Virginia when Jack Kennedy was running and West Virginia was so important: Bob McDonough was the guy. When the President was elected, Bob was the guy who got credit for all the federal funds for West Virginia and was able to do things. When I met him during RFK's campaign Bob lived in Virginia. We had a great relationship. He was just a seedy curmudgeon from the hills of West Virginia, and a great guy.

When Bob became terminally ill I remember I said to Senator Kennedy: "Some night when we are heading home it would be great to stop by and see Bob McDonough." And when Ted came in Bob's bedroom it was like Bob McDonough had died and gone to heaven before he died. They spent an hour and I stepped out so they could just reminisce.

There is another interesting part of the story, not related particularly to Senator Kennedy. The big issue in West Virginia was construction of roads and highways. The federal funding from JFK's administration, for which bob McDonough received credit, helped build Route I-79 that went through West Virginia. When Bob died he chose to have his ashes sprinkled over I-79. [*laughter*] I always thought, *That's classic McDonough.*

As Senator Kennedy has felt his own losses, he is so empathetic to those other folks who—to just reach out and—

Young: Do you have the impression that this is something that came to him, a quality he developed as a public figure? Or do you have any sense whether that was the way he was as a child or young man?

Kirk: I don't have any ability to know that he had it as a child. But I do have to believe, knowing what I know about his family—a family of deep religious faith—that comforting the sorrowful is something that one should do. I think that's in his nature. But to some extent, having suffered as much as he's suffered and had the kind of heartache that he has had, the series of tragedies, that he understood better than anyone what a helping hand or comforting hug would mean to somebody.

I feel for him for how many times—because he is a public figure, and has so many friends—that he's asked to eulogize or speak at their funerals. It's got to be brutal. I've said to my wife, "How many times, O Lord, must this poor fellow prepare and deliver another eulogy." But it's what he does, because I think he feels it's a big obligation.

The flip side of it, and you've probably seen it yourself, is that despite all the tragedies, despite all the losses, I don't know any other person who brings such joy to others; in his own way, he walks in a room and fills it up with a story, and all of a sudden sucks all the oxygen out of the air. He's having as good a time as anyone; he's just a gregarious human being. So there's that. Also his love of song and music, other aspects of his life, how he finds the time to paint and do these other things. He loves a good story.

More often than not, if you have to define his political direction, I suppose this is also part of his family. It's always the politics of hope; it's never politics for politics' sake or politics of fear or division, it's always for some positive end. To enhance, encourage, give foundations, give opportunity. I have a sense, Jim, that these personal virtues or values go directly back into his public life. It's not as if you've got this individual who is doing certain good deeds in his personal life for whatever reasons and then you go back into the public life of the Senate and he becomes sort of the hard-knuckled Senator. He is the same human being.

His choice of committee assignments and what he wants to do more times than not is on behalf of the underdogs or those who don't have their own spokesperson. I hope that when people read about, think about Senator Kennedy years from now, they will understand that he was much more than the political poster boy for his opponents, who've done a great job of painting a caricature. Rather, I think they'll realize this was an extraordinary human being. All his energy aside, I really do think it's part of this purpose of life, life of purpose that provides this constant and continuing motivation. "That's what you do. That's why you're here."

Young: You think it was particularly true for him, the youngest brother, in a fairly competitive family?

Kirk: Fairly competitive!?! [*laughter*]

Young: That this purpose had to be particularly strong with him to carry him through, this sense of purpose and achievement? I think the achievement is also very important. Do you think so? Of achieving something?

Kirk: Oh absolutely, and that's on a day-to-day basis in the Senate as well. You don't come in here *not* to achieve the ends that you set out. But at the core, I don't think it's necessarily just to succeed for himself. Rather, "If I get this done, how many hundreds of thousands of people are going to benefit from it?" And if it has the Kennedy name on it, that's a twofer.

Young: But it doesn't have to have the Kennedy name on it, at least in the politics of the Senate.

Kirk: No.

Young: Putting his name on it is not the most important thing. I think the persistence at something, I think about both of his brothers, he has been around so much longer. They did not have the opportunity that he has had to make the long run, so that if you don't get it all this time, another time will come. This is I guess very much a part of his character too. You get things done, and if you don't get everything, there'll be another day. He has the safest seat there could ever be, so it also provides that opportunity for him to not think just about the next election. Not that he would anyway.

Kirk: You might ask yourself the question, if Ted was the second born, would he be the same person? Of course we'll never know the answers to these questions. But when Jack Kennedy was a Senator for at least four years, he had his eyes on the Presidential prize. When Bobby was a Senator, he had his eyes on the prize. When Senator Ted Kennedy came to the Senate, because of the normal actuarial tables, as a first matter I think he decided, *This is where I'm going to be.* The President dies and Bobby comes to the Senate. Bobby runs for President and was killed. Now the actuarial tables are violently upset, if you will, and an opportunity for some higher station is open.

There was hesitancy for a lot of reasons, but—I think I spoke to this in a previous interview—maybe to some degree he felt he had to. First of all he understood that you can get more done as the President of the United States than you can as one of 100.

Young: This is a question that a lot will puzzle over. There is a theory, you've perhaps heard of it, that it was after the 1980 run that he finally became a real Senator, that is, heart, mind, and soul in that. I'm not convinced about that, but it's an interesting and important question. Where was he headed and what brought him to the Senate? Where did he see his future, his contribution? His brothers had other things. His thing—"the thing that I do." There was something about his temperament or something that seems so well suited.

Kirk: I think there's something to the thesis that after the Presidential campaign he looked inside himself and said, *Listen, maybe it wasn't the best campaign, but we took our shot,* and he had learned the legislative process, learned how to win the respect of his colleagues by his abilities to listen to them, trust them, and they trusted him. I think he had had significant schooling and experience there, and had earlier tried the Assistant Majority Leader assignment. But I think, Jim, after the '80 campaign, that he really decided, *The Senate is my public life, and I'm going to do everything I can to be the best I can be.* That's my take on it. In other words, he wasn't looking over his shoulder to do anything else but—

Young: But was he earlier?

Kirk: Earlier than 1980?

Young: Yes, before 1980. Were his eyes as a Senator on the prize also?

Kirk: Well, I think after 1964—I wasn't there, but I just have this sense that after '64, there was a sense probably in his own heart and probably in the minds of the national body politic that there was an inevitability to the Presidential candidacy of Ted Kennedy. So then you know the history—'68 too much, too soon. Chappaquiddick, '72, and then the press took us through this whole "will he or won't he?" national dialogue. For reasons I didn't agree with, he chose 1980 to run. When it didn't work, I don't think he felt this was a mortal blow to his prestige or even his ego, but that there were still important things to do. He had enough of the—how should I say—the years of grounding in the Senate already that it wasn't so difficult to—

Young: He was very good at being a Senator. It wasn't any stepping stone.

Kirk: So the lure of "The grass is always greener," or "We're going to have to move on to some other plateau," wasn't there anymore. So it was—you know the whole story better than I, but at this point it didn't make that much difference in terms of how he conducts himself, Senate majority or minority, the workhorse is here again. Absolutely tenacious and pushing the legislative envelope, whatever issues there might be.

Young: Do you think he had the sense—this is very speculative. But was he the kind of person who would naturally see the Presidency, the executive part, as the place you got things done? Certainly that was brother John's—

Kirk: No question.

Young: And yet he was always remarkably tolerant and seemed to enjoy the deliberative process, the politics of the Senate, the personal parts of working people to get what you wanted. Yet this was very different, apparently, from what people say about his brother Robert. In the Senate he seemed to be very impatient with the Senate.

Kirk: Bobby was impatient. I wasn't there either, but I think he felt, *I know where I'm headed, and it's not here.* First of all the two brothers had two different personalities and two different goals.

Young: Elaborate on that a bit, the goals.

Kirk: Well, by that I mean—maybe I should say ambitions. But I think it was pretty apparent, certainly looking back, that when Robert Kennedy came to the Senate I think everybody expected that this was just a step toward a Presidential candidacy, which of course it proved to be. So from Robert Kennedy's point of view, you could make the argument that he really didn't have a lot of patience with the legislative process. I suppose when one is driven to do something else, you could quickly conclude to use the Senate as an opportunity and a springboard and not a place where you're going to spend a lot of time with colleagues.

Young: Talking, not doing.

Kirk: Yes, as distinguished from his brother about whom we're talking—a different personality. I think he enjoys people and company perhaps more than Robert Kennedy did. Ted Kennedy is a much more outgoing, gregarious, welcoming, engaging personality. So that. Therefore collegiality in the Senate is not difficult for him. "People. I like them." And so it's give and take.

Robert Kennedy was much more introverted, solemn. I loved him for—although I didn't know him all that well—for the passion that he had. But they were two different sons with two different personalities. I think apart from the "This is a stopping-off point in the Senate," the personalities also are distinctive.

After the 1980 Presidential campaign of Edward Kennedy, my sense is that maybe he wished things had ended up differently, but he was quite comfortable coming back to a place where by that point he knew he could do well. Obviously he's proven himself right.

Young: Some people have talked about the executive temperament, if somebody has an executive temperament. Ted Kennedy has a legislative temperament, temperament being those things that you're doing, effective in a situation where you can't give a command except to your own staff. You can't command, and you're working in a body of individuals. Does that capture something of the difference between the brothers?

Kirk: I would say that Edward Kennedy has obviously a legislative temperament, the one you're describing. But I think he could adapt to an executive—

Young: You do.

Kirk: Absolutely, and would love it in the public domain. If he had become President of the United States, it would have been fulfilling, and, as we said earlier he'd probably be able to accomplish more. But yes, I think he has some patience with the legislative process, some impatience if things aren't going well in his office or even if he feels he's not doing as well as he might. He probably gets impatient with himself. But I think he could adapt to the executive role much easier than Robert Kennedy did to the legislature as a matter of temperament.

The other thing—back to character—is his constancy of principle in the kinds of things that he takes on. What's curious about it, and I probably won't say it well, is that you have to compromise in the Senate obviously, and one of your gifts has to be some sense of what's real, pragmatic, what you have to give away in order to get certain things done. But I don't think there's anybody that you'll talk to who would say that in order to accomplish something he gave up a fundamental value or principle that he believed in, which is somewhat remarkable in itself.

There are all kinds of different forces and agendas and appeals and so forth, and probably quid pro quos. But I find, through my experience and my own observations since I left the Senate staff, that the two things that are constant are his adherence to principle and his almost unbridled energy and tenacity in pursuit of them. I think I've said this to you before when we were down on the veranda. He is, I think, unique in that way in terms of his unrelenting work ethic and energy.

You can think what he does in a day and say, "This guy is 33 years old. He must be wanting something, because I never saw anybody who worked harder." But here he is, almost 75, all those years behind him, and you say to yourself, *Tell me again, what does he do?*

I really believe two things. One I said before, that he believes, *This is what you're born to do, serve a life of purpose, and this is what I do best, and why should I give up?* And the other thing, I think mentioned this to you before, is maybe a little bit of, *I was blessed with the gift of years*

that none of my brothers was blessed with. There's some need to fulfill the Kennedy name and legacy, and what was taken away from them and the family.

I could still hold that standard and carry it forward as long as I'm able. I think somewhere there's a little kernel of that that provides further fuel beyond what he wants to accomplish as an individual. So all those things combine, all for the right reasons. I can't find anything cynical about what Senator Kennedy does. He does it with a passion and loves to be able to do something for people. So I get worn out talking about it. [*laughter*]

Young: He does that. His father wanted him to be in the Senate, did he not?

Kirk: Yes.

Young: I think he wanted to too, but I'm never quite sure.

Kirk: You mean he hadn't—

Young: Well, I've asked you. Before it was clear what his brother Robert would be doing, it seemed as though there was a vacant seat in the Senate in Massachusetts, and that might be a vacancy, and that was Robert's. So numerous people, [Adam] Clymer and others, have mentioned his seriously considering going west to make his independent career.

Kirk: I remember stories about it. After the '60 campaign he loved Montana and the inter-mountain West states.

Young: He was thinking of Arizona, maybe California or something. His father said no to that. "You stay in Massachusetts." I'm searching for a sense of when this drive really manifested itself, because you are not thinking from his earlier life that—well, it's not entirely true, but you wouldn't think looking up to the time that he went through college that he was headed in the direction he ended up in. You can impute it, but that wasn't the kind of drive you saw. However, in law school, I think it was not in the courses so much, but it was the moot court, and that was really something. He himself pays a lot of attention to that as a taste of deliberation, argumentation, persuasion, and homework. He and John Tunney just—and as one of them said, "You always have to work three times harder than anybody else."

Kirk: Said what?

Young: "You have to work three times harder than anybody else is the story of my life." [*laughter*] To get—so I'm just speculating out loud about this drive for public service, and all of those qualities that you've seen to give back, to all the motivations that go into this, the dedication that goes into this, when that becomes apparent in his career. I think it probably becomes most apparent once he had found a place, that is, once he was in the Senate. What do you think?

Kirk: Yes, I think I would say public service was preordained for him. This is what the Kennedy family is going to do. Look at what the girls did. Special Olympics. Very Special Arts. Kathleen [Cavendish] overseas, all of them. Every single one of the children except Rosemary [Kennedy], who was just disabled. Even she became a role model for further service through Eunice's

[Kennedy Shriver] art, so all that was preordained. He would have had to have been the family rebel if he was going to decide he was going to go off and do something else. So, yes, the question was where, when.

Young: That's really what I'm talking about. Where does it—

Kirk: I think you answered to some degree by the fact that his father was the team captain or coach, saying, "OK, this is what we do. OK, Ted, let me tell you where you're going."

Young: "Now it's your turn."

Kirk: Yes. So first it's the assistant DA [district attorney] in Suffolk County, take that law degree and start to do some things, move around, become a little bit of a public figure. Meanwhile Robert Kennedy is Attorney General. I think like any father Ambassador Kennedy's saying, "If all goes well, Jack will serve two terms. Bobby will be at his side." So now here we are—1962. What are you going to ask Ted, to sit around? OK, so I'm making it up to some degree, Jim, that part of it. But I think you get what I'm saying. I believe that his father was obviously an important figure and steering things initially. As the guy says to some degree "the rest is history."

Young: He's quoted as saying when he was running in Massachusetts in '62 he just loves the street politics. But these issues, my God. [*laughter*]

Kirk: Yes, and now.

Young: "Now this is mine." Now you take—I think his brother John said he was the best politician in the family, Teddy is, I think that was probably referring to that and his real gift and interest in people.

Kirk: Personality.

Young: Yes, and now you look at what he began doing very early in the Senate, somebody who didn't—all this issues stuff, and applying himself to that. It was immigration, it was health care. Now there's hardly any issue you can talk about that he doesn't know at all, and it's natural.

Kirk: My take on that is that I don't think people change that much, but they grow. I would say that you probably couldn't land on a particular day or even a particular year, but it was an evolution and a maturing in "the greatest deliberative body in the world," and he finds himself being pretty good at it.

Young: He worked like hell at it too, in terms of the preparation.

Kirk: Absolutely.

Young: One of his colleagues said, "He comes to the Senate floor with a head full of knowledge. He knows more than anybody else." And this is really almost an obsession with him, I think.

Kirk: Was it Trent Lott or Lindsey Graham within the last month or so on the immigration bill? He said publicly something about, "If you're going to work with Ted Kennedy, know one thing. You're going to learn something. You'd better bring your lunch." It was really nice, from one of these guys who's ideologically on the other side. But it was a good comment. I didn't get it just right. But I remember the gist.

So my sense is it's a transitional, maturing, educational growth, and probably with all that too a better understanding of how much difference you can make if you can get some of this done.

It's to the consternation of his Democratic colleagues that he worked with the [George H.W.] Bush administration, with the Republicans on legislation. I know that there are many times his colleagues would say, "What are you doing that for? We need the issue." And he'd be saying, "No, we need the results. That's what we need. We need the results."

So it's more a matter of him growing in the job. Then it's like anything else. Well, maybe not like anything else, because sometimes people grow in a job and then get tired of it. But he never gets tired.

Young: I'm struck by the way he worked these issues dinners and all the various ways in which he asks questions or he gets people to talk to him, educate him. There are some eloquent accounts by various people I've interviewed of going out to the house for dinner, going to the office, or something like that. They're talking, and he's not running the meeting.

Kirk: He's not what?

Young: He's not running the meeting. This story has repeated itself so many times. "So I'm asking myself, *What the hell are we doing here? Is he listening?* And by the time it's over"—and this is in account after account—"by the time it's over he says, 'Well, I think it's about time, this is getting pretty late.'"

Kirk: "Wrap this up."

Young: "Wrap this up." And then he gives a complete, accurate, concise—

Kirk: Synopsis.

Young: Synopsis. He has picked out the points where people were saying different things but they themselves don't recognize them. He says, "I'd like to hear more about—you were not saying the same things. So I'd like to hear more about that." Is that distinctive of him? Did his brothers do this? Do you know?

Kirk: The homework part is I would say probably not distinctive of him. He had enough humility to say, "Geez, I don't have this expertise. I need the best brains in the country." And he can command the ability to listen and discern what is really important and put the rest aside and say, "Hey, these are the key points and takeaways from this thing." I think that's a skill acquired in the United States Senate, and he's as good as he is at it because two weeks later when you're back in conference, he might say, "Jim, I remember what you said about the most important part

here," and so forth. Well, Jim says, "That's impressive." So I think it's an important skill. Maybe it's something that you become more proficient at with time. A discreet and discerning listener.

Young: It's a way of mastering the subject without relying on books entirely. By getting real people.

Kirk: Yes, for books there's precious little time. Develop an expertise when there's a quorum call on some other subject, and you're into volume eight. [*laughter*] Ain't going to happen.

Young: I'm just wondering whether that was a signature of—

Kirk: I think pulling together the best experts goes with the Kennedy homework character.

Young: Yes, that does.

Kirk: I have no way of comparing the brothers' abilities at—I assume they could do the same, but—

Young: How can he not get discouraged in these years where it is so—think of what his aims were very early—the health care, the national health insurance. He didn't prevail on Vietnam. We've got Iraq. The courts walked away basically on school integration, federal courts did, so that you don't hear about that much anymore. Civil rights in the context of the '60s and '70s. I can imagine somebody with the ideological turn and our current President probably would just get very discouraged and say—

Kirk: Yes, he's the 180-degree opposite from that. First of all, at his heart he's an optimist, and also I think there's a quality about him that believes the worst thing you can do is give up or give in. He's one of these never give up, never give in type of guys. While he may wish things were better and is disheartened with the climate and all the rest of it, it's not going to drive Ted Kennedy away. Not even—

Young: Or even get bored with it.

Kirk: No. I think in some ways the worse it gets it's like, "Now more than ever this is where we can really stand out, adhere to what we believe." It's the same thing I said earlier about his principles. It becomes somewhat overused, because it was what he believed in his '80 campaign, the "sailing against the wind." It's what he does in his public life. He's a perfect fit. So there's something in his genes or in his heart that believes sailing downwind is easy, but if you can win sailing up, that's special.

Young: When the going got really tough, when [Ronald] Reagan came in, and there was the real ideological turn to the right, and then they started backtracking with all civil rights, undoing them, that happened to have been after the '80 campaign. But it was also a turn to the right in history and politics. It brought out the absolute best in him. It really tested his skills and his drive and his determination. Because to be instrumental in passing things over Reagan's veto— and there were significant things they were doing in that. So we'll never know if he had won how history would have turned. That's pretty far out.

I want to ask you about what you think is his legacy for the next generations ahead that look back on this time. In a sense he stands out in history as a modern version of a phenomenon. You don't see much, really, in history unless you go back to the century before last, the golden age of the Senate, so to speak, when the Senate was important, it wasn't embattled, and you had long-serving people who could exercise statecraft from a Senate seat, which he has done. What do you think people should take out of the instruction of his career and his accomplishments?

Kirk: Well, I suppose one thing is that his own career and legacy expressed a seriousness of purpose about public service and public responsibility. If you can look at politics not as a career path, but if you can look at politics as a set of values that you can drive, elevate, implement during a career, then I would say that the next generation should look at Edward Kennedy. Just because those accomplishments wouldn't be achieved, tenacity of the work ethic is distinctive. Another thing that I'd mention is almost the unique aspect of his human quality, the size of his "heart" and the generosity of his own individual human spirit are things that, in combination with the political figure, I find extraordinary.

I think you could say about him what others have said, and perhaps he has said about his brothers, and what can be said about him is by his record of achievements, how he thought about public service, public life. It really could be described as a noble calling. His career had a noble aspect about it, lacking in cynicism. So there are definitely some inspirational/educational aspects of this. Still trying to struggle with what happens to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate.

Young: It's big.

Kirk: How do you crystallize the mission so that the elements that people take from it answer the question that you asked?

Young: It's really an impossible question to answer in terms of—because you don't know the context. I'm talking about generations not my own, in the future. But if you try to put yourself in the shoes of how people look at politics, one hopes, it seems to me, that it will be an antidote to the fairly deep-seated cynicism about politics. I can imagine people saying, "Yes, but what good is that in this kind of world?" In the future. "He was such a giant. It's an inspiration, but it's not a model for the new times." I don't know.

Kirk: Well, one of the things that is likely not to go away as a societal matter is the growing separation economically and otherwise. I don't know where that's headed, but I don't see any kind of closure around the middle class. Everything's squeezing them. Just from a philosophical point of view, one other aspect about Senator Kennedy's career—it's always been for people who struggle. In other words, "This is what is needed. These other guys can take care of themselves. They know how to 'play the game.'" Folks who don't know how to "play the game" and are probably turned off by "the game," seeing the cynical aspect of politics, he's always been the champion of the blue-collar guy, the 40 million without insurance, that's where he is. Those with disabilities, it's always, "Who needs it most?" And so that has been a big part of his story.

I certainly hope that there would be a day when—this again goes back to the importance of the Presidency, but—the use of the bully pulpit to do what a Ted Kennedy would do with it, calling

the society to the highest instincts, and challenging them for the best reasons. It's very much a part of the legacy that he followed. I don't know whether that can happen again without a President who really understands it, who believes it, and has the guts to call for some sacrifice, challenge Congress. It's hard to do from the Senate.

Young: One has to see what happens after this Presidency. There have been two or three episodes in American history. The wartime Presidency was given great license and latitude to do what it wouldn't be allowed to do at other times. Then after it's over or it goes wrong, as in the case of the War of 1812, the Senate and the Congress step back in. If there's something of that reaction, then it does appear to me that the story of him and the Senate not only on just the war issues but the possibilities of the Congress as a constitutional check and as an innovative source of ideas for governing—after all, a lot of ideas, much more than come out of the executive these days.

I hope that when the center is established here somehow they have a favorable environment for looking not just at him but him as an example and personification of the potentialities of the constitutional Senate, as a deliberative body, as a place of ideas, as a place where you have to find out what's acceptable to many different people before you make the decision. I hope that can happen. I see that's one of the ways I look at him as a person preeminently suited for all that the Senate is and might be. There are not many other examples you can find in recent history now.

Kirk: That's true.

Young: There's Bob Byrd, of course.

Kirk: Yes.

Young: Needless to say, very different people. You wanted to say a few things about some of these incidents that we were talking about before the tape rolled about the school busing violence, threats in Boston. You mentioned you were with him then, weren't you?

Kirk: I was on the staff at the time. The incident that I remember most was the one at the federal government center going back to his office. But South Boston—the most difficult part of that for him was that the residents of South Boston were his people. Even though he had defeated Eddie McCormack, all those partisan parochial alliances said everything was OK because Kennedy won, and besides he's one of our guys, and now he's fighting for us, and so forth. Of course when busing came up, it was like one of their own had gone in directions totally alien to them. It grew from disagreement on the issue to outright hate. Basically that's what it was.

I forget the details exactly, but I know we were somewhere else in the state or around Boston. Many of us were to meet back in the office, and the question was could he get back to his office. I'm vivid in terms of what the subject matter was, but vague about the specifics of the conversation. But the thrust was, "How can we not go back to the office? How will it be if the United States Senator who's taken a position on an issue can't get into his own office because—" So a judgment was made. I don't know, by the way, whether at some point you will or have talked to Jimmy King, who was in the Senator's office at the time and did a lot of the advance stuff.

Young: Yes.

Kirk: But what I remember, Jim, is getting to the office and there were hundreds of people outside and around. We got out and started through the crowd. If you're familiar with the building, it's a lot of glass on the front. I frankly thought the glass was going to give way. It's not just glass. It's reinforced. Epithets were flung and I remember—

Young: He had tried to speak.

Kirk: Yes, and—

Young: And they turned their backs.

Kirk: Yes. Guys were yelling, "I hope your kid dies of cancer." Everything you could possibly imagine. It was a frightening moment for him and for us physically, but it was also frightening just in terms of the outright rage and division that this issue had caused. I felt so sad after a while, just wrung out by the fact that these two groups of folks in the same city were suddenly so bitterly divided. Then remarkably that year the Celtics won the championship. Sometimes sports does it. It united the city over an all-Boston sports success. I love sports, and it was the only thing that could bring Bostonians together for a night or two, to celebrate the Celtics. Then they're back in their respective ghettos.

So it was a sad and unhealthy and frightening episode that really was the height of hostile politics for Senator Kennedy. Gradually with time things healed. You have somebody like Billy Bulger of South Boston, later the President of the Massachusetts Senate. He and Senator Kennedy are big pals, and with a sense of perspective and the rest of it, finally things came together. But it was hostile territory for sure.

The other one I talked about briefly was probably later, '69 or so, maybe early '70. First of all, I was early on in the staff. I had no interest in really coming back to help in politics at all after Robert Kennedy's death. It just emotionally was, "Why do I want to do this?" Dave Burke and others said, "You've got to come do it." So eventually I said I would. This was in the first few months. The Bobby Seale trial was on, and the black community, particularly the younger generation, was up in arms. The Senator had accepted an invitation to go to the Yale Political Union. We went down and came into this—it was like a dining room. He and I were probably the only Caucasians in the room, and the—

Young: This was at Yale?

Kirk: This was at Yale. The Yale Political Union is an important college forum. Every so often they invite distinguished guests to come. The hate in the room was palpable. It was like we are against anything to do with the establishment, no matter who you were. But these were students at Yale University. So it was quite a reflection of what was going on. But it wasn't so much a question of fear, I don't think, in that instance, for his physical security. What I remember is the courage he had to just go in and talk to these guys and listen to them and respond to questions. He didn't have to. But it was perhaps a way to allow them to release some air from a balloon that was about to burst.

I thought afterwards that this was arguably, a more difficult mission than Robert Kennedy's when he went to Indianapolis the night of Martin Luther King's death. Because in that instance Robert Kennedy was the messenger of the sad news. The listening audience was shocked, and surely outraged, and so forth. But they were still in a receptive mode of the traumatic dimension of what had happened and were willing to listen. This crowd at Yale, they knew all they needed to know, and Senator Kennedy came in as a white establishment figure. He was more of a verbal target than a welcome visitor. Yet he—

Young: Did they allow him to talk?

Kirk: Yes, they allowed him to talk. Eventually he was able to open up a dialogue with them. I don't think that they left feeling absolute trust. But he clearly made a difference, just in terms of lowering the temperature. But I remember leaving that event thinking, *Is this what we're going to do?* But it was one of those things that he felt he had to do. Now that I think of it, Jean Smith might have been there. I think she drove down or had somebody drive her down from New York. Probably a chance to see her brother while he was in the area, but she also knew what was going on. It was one of those searing moments that in my early indoctrination on the staff I thought, *Going around this circle of potential violence one more time—this is why I didn't want to get back in it.* But I remember going away thinking it really took guts.

Young: That was a revolutionary time, it seems to me, because everything, the war—

Kirk: Turmoil, hatred, violence. Not a good time. But you asked earlier about getting discouraged. I think he has that positive, upbeat attitude toward life, that no matter how many things get thrown your way you keep going on. [*laughter*] And he's had his share, obviously.

Young: Right. You discover things about the people of your country that you never confronted when you were growing up. It wasn't the politics of violence at that time. Separation. That was a new twist in the—I imagine because you had something you had to confront as a public service that people of his father's generation never had to confront. The baptism I think was 1960 for the country and for the family.

Kirk: Exactly.

Young: It was nothing that figured in their—so the reactions of all the brothers to it is very interesting, because it's their first encounter with that kind of political phenomenon. I think they met the test rather well. One other little thing—you were on the '94 Senate campaign?

Kirk: Is this the Dave Burke question?

Young: This is the Dave Burke question.

Kirk: OK.

Young: Even though he won't be reading this for some time. But I feel—

Kirk: [*laughter*] At least I can tell him his question was asked. This is on the debates?

Young: Yes. Mitt Romney.

Kirk: Mitt Romney. Well, let's see. I was an outside advisor, and the debates were happening. Also I think I've been in other situations as Co-Chairman of the Commission on Presidential Debates, so perhaps the Senator figured I had background experience, and I was pretty good at negotiating. What happened is the Romney campaign and the Kennedy campaign agreed to debate. Then the question is where and when and how many and all that stuff. But the issue I think Dave's referring to—I got my good friend and Senator Kennedy's former Administrative Assistant Eddie Martin, maybe you know he passed away this year.

Young: Yes.

Kirk: He and I were the Kennedy representatives at this meeting. There was Charley Manning, who represented Romney, probably a couple of other fellows whose names I forget for the moment. We were talking about the fact that it was going to be at Faneuil Hall on a certain night. Somebody brought a video of the last debate held at Faneuil Hall, which was Bill Weld, incumbent Republican Governor, and Mark Roosevelt, his challenger in the last Governorship race, who was a former state rep. They had a debate and at our meeting they played this tape of their debate at Faneuil Hall. Maybe it was just to give those of us in the meeting a sense of the format and how their particular format worked.

Bill Weld was a big, tall guy, about six-five, and when I was looking at this video, it looked as if Bill Weld was—you know those little elementary school desks with the inkwells? It looked like Weld was much too big for this podium. Obviously I'm thinking about our candidate, who at this point is way overweight, and all I could think of was Senator Kennedy in his then physical oversize as he would look behind these podiums. That would be at the end of the debate. So I tried not to make a big issue out of it, because if I did—

Young: Yes.

Kirk: So I said something about, "Geez, that's very unfortunate that Bill Weld had such a small podium, given his height." I said, "We ought to just make sure we have an opportunity to figure out what the right structure is," or something vague like that. "Oh, yes, absolutely, we should do that," Romney's people said. "OK, so you don't mind if we get our own podium, as long as it's acceptable to you?" "No, that's fine," they said.

So whatever number of days there were between that meeting and the debate, Eddie Martin and I went out to some warehouse in Arlington and they had some daises and podia there. we found two podia downstairs in this building, which are good size, plenty of breadth, and we had two of them brought to Faneuil Hall. Somehow Marty Nolan, formerly of the *Boston Globe*, got word of the matter and he wrote this story about the debate. Something about, "And Kirk got these two condominiums and brought them into the hall." But in any event what was critical about it is that we didn't have to suffer this whole humiliation of sidebar stories about Senator Kennedy's size as compared to—

Young: Mitt Romney's.

Kirk: Oh, yes. Until the debate was over and Nolan or somebody got wind of the story, I don't think the Romney folks even paid any attention to it, but then, when Marty wrote his column, they knew they'd been had afterward. By the way, that was the Senator's finest hour in the toughest campaign he ever had.

Young: Yes, it was a tough one. The campaign staff had been reluctant for him to—everybody had been reluctant, hadn't they, for him to even debate?

Kirk: Senator Kennedy?

Young: Yes.

Kirk: Oh, yes.

Young: The Washington staff said, "Forget it."

Kirk: But Romney was coming on so strong. The pressure. What's happened with debates in the past campaigns, figure out when the challenging candidate gets the best attention—we'll do it on a Friday night at 6:30 P.M. on the radio in West Springfield for 45 minutes. In other words, the less the better. You couldn't in the '94 race—here's a Senator who's been in office for 30 years. He had no choice. It had to happen. I remember the day of the debate. I was out here at the Kennedy Library, and he came to review his notes and to reflect. It was like this is where he came to get strength, as if he was to be in the shadow of his brother's place and ask for his inspiration. Quiet. Then he put on his game face and he was at his best. That was it. It was all over after that.

Young: Well, Dave also mentioned about those briefing books. Did he ever tell you that story?

Kirk: No.

Young: The Senator's briefing books, going to the hall.

Kirk: For that night? He may have. I've probably forgotten.

Young: Well, I shouldn't put this on tape, telling tales out of court. I'll tell you about it after I shut the tape off. Thank you very much.

Kirk: Thank you, Jim.