INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES SYMINGTON

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Congressman Symington's office in Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Congressman Symington, tell us very briefly something about your career, and how you came to arrive at the point where you are at this moment in history.

S: I guess I grew up in a family with a public service background.

My mother's side really reaches back to the beginnings of the country: the Wadsworth family. I remember my grandfather, James Wadsworth, very well. He had been in the Senate two terms, but I knew him as a congressman, because he had come from the Senate to the Congress in 1932, when I was five years old.

My father at that time was in business, and I used to hear a lot of conversations between them, not always in agreement on public affairs, my father having been the son of a Democratic judge in Baltimore and my grandfather being Republican. During my school days, until I was out of high school, my father was in business.

In 1945, the year I graduated from Deerfield Academy, he went into the government as Surplus Property Administrator, and my grandfather was still in the House. I think I recall my father asking my grandfather if he should accept a post under

the Truman Administration, and my grandfather simply said, "The President has asked you. What choice do you have?" That created an indelible impression on my memory. But I think that I was fortunate to be able to grow up in a family without the immediate pressure of public life on me. That is to say, I'd get it every summer when I visited my grandfather, but at least it wasn't the daily stuff of life in my own household.

F: Yet close enough to get some understanding of a political environment.

S: Right. And when he went in the government, he came to live in Washington. My father and mother got an apartment in the Shoreham Hotel. It was about a year later that I first met the then-Congressman Johnson, because he and my father were good friends. I think Dad had campaigned for him, not in his first races because Johnson'd been here since 1932, but in 1948 when he ran for the Senate.

F: Yes. He had run first in 1941 and barely been defeated in a special election which didn't affect his congressional status; and then he came back and ran again in 1948.

S: I remember visiting the Johnsons. They had a house in Chevy Chase, I think, and they had a big porch around it, and I used to sit, and Mom and Dad would go out and sit with them. They had a swinging chair, and we'd just talk. It was before air conditioning. Everything was outside--and iced tea--and I met the girls that time, too. They were both little girls at that time.

Then I went into the Marines, 1945-1946, got out, went to Yale; and during that time between 1945 and 1950 my father's progress in the government was very clear, going through assistant secretary of war for air, secretary of air, chairman of the National Security Resources Board, chairman of the RFC in 1951. I was out of college in 1950, and, of course, I was commuting to Washington as frequently as I was to St. Louis, because that was where my family was, and I got to know quite a few people here including, in my younger college days, then Jackie Bouvier, who was a local debutante of some renown. She later became engaged, actually, to a good friend of mine, the nephew of my godfather, a boy named John Husted; that was before she met Jack Kennedy and cancelled those plans.

In 1952 Dad decided to leave government. I think he was going to go back into business, but he was, by a few Missourians, talked into running for the Senate in 1952. I had finished one year of law school. He asked if I could come out and help him in his race. This meant virtually leaving law school in 1952, which I did. This was a fateful decision for me, but a rather good one based on the fact that by then I was already getting a feeling for political life. It was coming home to me. I was in law.

Why law? Well, having gotten out of Yale with a B.A. degree in English, I realized that I wasn't yet prepared to make a living. By that time my father was already pushing law, having not had it

himself and having always said, "I wish I was a lawyer." I thought he had had just about everything a man could want. My brother, too, decided on law and was studying up at Harvard. But I took this year out, and my brother took the summer out, and we campaigned throughout the state of Missouri.

As you know, that was an Eisenhower year even in Missouri. He carried the state by 30,000 votes; we carried it by maybe 150,000 against the tide. That was really due, I think, to a very vigorous primary fight against the then-Attorney General Buck Taylor, who was the man Truman had previously pledged to support. I think that Truman once said that Stuart Symington had more ability in his little finger than Taylor had in his whole body, but that was not, of course, a matter of public record.

This was a tough primary, and we went into about 100 of the 114 counties. We drove about 25,000 miles in our car, between May and November, in both races. It acquainted me with my home state in an indelible way, and it was great to see my father progress in this field. He's an executive by nature and not particularly disposed to stumping, but he was at his best going into the offices of journalists, fellows sitting in green visors, and to the boys working the press, and talking quietly with people in small lunch groups. He was not as good as some of the other gentlemen standing at a podium talking to a thousand people at an organized meeting. He was pretty good at the unorganized meetings, very good, and he

managed to get a lot of opinion leaders throughout the state supporting him.

We got about 90 of 114 county papers supporting us, and that reaffirmed my faith in how people arrive at these decisions; because we were told that we'd be murdered, that he had no political base, and that Taylor had eight years as attorney general and had all the assistant attorneys general working for him and so forth, and [that] no one knew Symington.

I went back to law school and finished up in 1954. I returned to St. Louis as assistant city counselor under the very progressive mayor, Ray Tucker. This was an experience in municipal law. I prosecuted in police courts; I prepared briefs for the city. Then I went into private practive from 1955-58.

Then I went into the Foreign Service from 1958 to 1960, because I had a break. I went to England in 1957 where my cousin, John Hay Whitney was ambassador. I went there to an American Bar convention in London. Whitney said he needed some help and asked me to be his special assistant. And I say yes. So we sold the house in St. Louis and moved to London. We spent two years there. I enjoyed the Foreign Service immensely, and naturally got a lot out of it and found out a little bit about some of the problems in dealing with people from another background.

I resigned and returned to the States because my father needed me again. This time he was going for the big one.

F: One interruption there. In 1952, after the primary--I'm sure that during the primary the non-Missouri people stayed out of it, but did Senator Johnson show his hand at all in the race between your father and the Republican?

S: I don't recall that Lyndon Johnson came into Missouri during that election; however, he may have done so. I can't remember everything. The most vivid memory I have is Bob Taft coming in during the general election and saying,"I've known Stuart Symington a long time; I admire and respect him greatly. I hope you'll vote for the Republican, because that will help us in Congress if you do."

F: That was a typical Taft campaign maneuver, wasn't it?

S: Well, that was pretty good, to get that much out of Taft, and that was when Dad was running against Jim [James P.] Kem in the general. Jim Kem was the incumbent, one of the class of 1946 which included Kem, [William F.] Jenner, [Elias K.] Kane, [Joseph R.] McCarthy, and some others. Quite a conservative fellow [Kem], but a very nice man. He's deceased now. Hiw widow lives in Virginia, I think.

In any event, I don't remember Lyndon coming into the state. I'm sure he would have wanted to do it, and I can't believe that he didn't, but I just don't remember that he did.

F: He wasn't a significant figure in it?

S: No. I could slip Chicago in 1956 into the conversation at this point, because I leapfrogged that. I was practicing law. Dad had no intention, hardly, of having any activity in Chicago at all.

I went up, really without his knowing it, just to look around. I went to his suite, and his phone was ringing, and I was on it the rest of the convention because there was a lot of interest in him then, and I ended up handling all his business there. There was the Harriman versus Stevenson business, and Dad was already getting interest from people. And then Kennedy had his close run for the vice presidential nomination. I never really saw Lyndon there. I think that he must have.been in the background, very much so. I didn't get into all the smoke-filled rooms by any means.

Then England; then back in 1960, and I came here and got an apartment in a hotel, and went to work at Arnold, Fortas, and Porter with the understanding that I could campaign. Of course, Abe Fortas supported Lyndon Johnson, but the firm had a rather wide acceptance of political views, and really encouraged political activities.

So I worked for Dad. I went into about twenty states for him. I didn't see Lyndon Johnson during my swing in the primaries. I went to New Mexico; that was as close as I got to him. He was represented there by Sam Rayburn. Campaigning at the New Mexico state convention were Senator [Clinton P.] Anderson, myself, Jack Kennedy, and Rayburn. I was there for Dad and I gave lighthearted talk which the newspapers liked quite a lot because we were obviously not in contention.

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I said: "Shall the mighty mavericks of New Mexico be meekly corralled by the cowboy from Cape Cod, on the one hand, and on the other hand, for some time Texas has eyed her neighbor with more than a casual interest, and a vote for the Senate majority leader might well be a vote for annexation.

So we handled it that way; then I went on to the convention. At the convention, my impression was, getting on buses and riding with these delegates back and forth from all over the place, that my father was everybody's second choice. Well above Stevenson, who was really out.

F: Just a few dedicated people.

S: Yes, and they were quite disappointed in Stevenson before it was over. He never even visited his headquarters, according to the fellows running it. He was quite coy.

F: Did you get the feeling that your father's thrust had started too late, and that Kennedy already had the thing sewed up as you went into these twenty states and made it to the convention?

S: Yes.

F: You had to play for some sort of a tie, didn't you?

S: Yes, I think that Dad's advice was well-founded, but just wrong. He could have entered, in my view, based just on reflection and how people arrive at decisions, the West Virginia primary, where he would have blunted Kennedy for sure, going in there as a family, just as they did.I would have had my own gut bucket, and we would

have sat around on some porches, and sung some songs, and talked to people about their problems, and not made a great use of rhetoric, but just the visiting that people appreciate. And without inundating them with verbiage and pledges the way Humphrey would do.

Well, his [Dad's] advice was to stay out of the primaries entirely. In the first place, they're very expensive. In the second place, of course, Kennedy and Humphrey were going to "knock each other off." Humphrey may have been Johnson's stalking horse. I don't know. I think that Humphrey wanted it for himself, but however Lyndon viewed Humphrey's effort is for him to say. In any event, that was our advice. I think Dad could have gone into Maryland and Indiana. Marylanders still think he's one of them, you see.

F: Yes.

S: I remember going to Baltimore during the primary period. He had a huge crowd of people. The name Symington means a lot in that area because of his father, the judge, and all the work he did, and his mother was a great civic leader there, my grandmother. But we didn't go into Maryland, and we didn't go into Indiana. I think Frank McKinney [Frank E. McKinney, ex-Democratic national chairman] said don't bother, because this is one place that Kennedy won't make it. I went to the--if it wasn't the state convention, it was a big dinner out there, and Kennedy had a way of coming late, so everybody else was more or less like an old shoe sitting around until suddenly the spotlight was on this young man

who would come in, smiling in all directions. He just generated a certain electricity, and I saw this. I said, "This is going to be rough out here." He had a lot of dedicated people helping him. Well, those were three that I think the old man could have either taken, or done very well in.

He didn't want to be the Protestants' candidate for the Democratic nomination. He was very concerned about that. He wanted very much for this race, however it turned out, to open up the gates regardless of creed. So he went to the convention, all of us did, still hopeful that it would deadlock.

You see, Truman came out and gave a nice little TV talk for Dad, and then mentioned Johnson in the same talk as also being preferable to the frontrunner. If Truman had come to that convention and given one more great performance, I think he could have held the line on the first ballot. He was going to come, and then I understand that someone went and talked him out of it. I nearly went to the phone myself, and called him, and said, "Look, Mr. President, I never asked you for anything" . . . Of course, why should I? Why should he give me anything? But, I just wanted to say, "My father worked pretty hard for you, and I'd love it if you could just see your way to coming out here."

I could see the Kennedy techniques of communication with their little radio beepers. They were in touch with every delegation. They knew much more, I think, about each delegate, and what his weak spots were and his hopes and aspirations, than any of the

other people. Maybe Johnson had the similar network of intelligence, but somehow I feel the Kennedys really made a study of it, in a very professional fashion.

Whereas we were just sort of the good guys of America. We had, I think, one delegation the night before the roll call. What the devil was it? Kansas, I think. We had it by one vote, and went to bed on it, and woke up and one vote had changed. I went and asked the guy, and he burst into tears right on the floor there, saying, "Don't ask me; I can't tell you." So, we just realized that we were really outclassed as far as a professional performance is concerned.

F: They had the technique.

S: Yes. So it was Wyoming, wasn't it, that turned for Kennedy? The last state on the list, what else could they do? But we knew that if Wyoming had held the whole thing had to start again, soft Kennedy votes start to shake out, and we would have a pretty good chance.

F: Kennedy nearly had to do it on the first ballot.

S: He just about had to do it on the first ballot, I think. It would be very interesting for someone to do a study of what would have happened on the second or third or fourth ballots. Such a study could be done with the information that everybody has, if you all pooled it together.

F: Well, I'm getting some of that.

S: It would be fascinating to see what would have happened. Because

I'd get in a bus with, say, Pennsylvanians, Ohioans, or Californians, and they would say, "Well, we love your father; we know he's got a great record and so forth; we'd love to be for him, but we can't; but if something happens to our guy we will." Then I'd get in a bus with Mississippians; they were wearing big hats; they were caterwauling around, and they'd say, "Listen, your dad is great, and if our boy doesn't make it, he's our boy." You see? So I really think he was in very good shape that way. But history not revealing its alternatives, it's difficult to know.

I'll never forget when the balloting was over for the president. I was one of the last people to leave, because it was coming home to me what a tremendous experience we'd all been through. And all the posters were on the floor, and covered with footprints, and smiling up at nothing. All kinds of chaff, and sawdust, and cigarette butts. And Orville Freeman was also kind of scuffing his way along in the turf, leaving at that time. I think he and I were pretty near the last two people to leave that place. Because I was trying to relive it, and ask myself if it really happened that way, and what exactly was it that did happen?

So then we all went back to our respective hotels, and, of course, that night was the big night of the choice of the vice president. We met as a family, and Dad said, "I just want to get the views of everybody as to whether I should take it or not." And my brother and I both said, "Well, that's not your kind of work. You like to have a base with responsibility and authority

to carry out a job." Up until then the only vice president we'd known, really, was [Alben] Barkley, who made fun of the job a lot, and Nixon, who we didn't really know much about. So, we didn't think of Dad as standing around in black tie at ceremonial functions and so forth, and we said, "This isn't what you came here for. Go back to the Senate."

Well, this conversation was in the context of complete belief that he would be offered it. To be fair about it, he didn't say at the time that he'd been offered it, but it seemed to us that he must have been, or we wouldn't be having this conversation.

F: There's a kind of irrefutable logic there.

S: Yes, right. I have one or two other little tidbits of recollection that would also support the fact that he had been offered it at one time or another, or not offered, but promised, different from being offered. Well, for example, he could have naturally had it if he'd turned Missouri's votes over to Kennedy. I remember Sarge Shriver was sitting in front of my wife, and when Missouri's name was called, he stood up and said, "It's your last chance." Well, we went down with banners flying, of course, for the old man. So we sort of voted against it, in our piety, thinking that we really had that kind of a choice.

F: Do you know whether your father and Senator Kennedy ever talked over these possibilities in the pre-convention days? I haven't seen your father yet.

S: I have the impression that they may not have done it directly, but through intermediaries, and I think maybe Clifford was the guy. I don't know. Clifford was with us. He was the only fellow not in

the family with us. So after we had all unloaded our little thoughts, Clifford sat back in his inimitable fashion, folded his fingers and nodded, and said, "Now, boys, that's all very well, but if the leader of your party, and the man who you hope to carry your flag into battle asks you for something, whatever it is, as Democrats, as citizens, as Americans, you offer it. Now what if he asks us for the most important kind of help that we could give him, the most significant help and the greatest honor? How would you refuse? How could you?" So we all said, "Okay, if you put it that way."

We went to bed in a troubled state of mind, fully expecting to wake up and find ourselves little goody shoes in the trail of the Kennedy crowd, number two, and all being patted on the head. Well, the first headline that I saw was "Symington the Choice." That was, I forget, the Los Angeles paper, one of them. And then the thing began to take a little longer. We weren't sure, and then we finally saw Kennedy on television, looking and talking as if he'd been up all night, because he got a few names mixed up, wrong titles to the right names. Senator Loveless of Iowa instead of Governor [Loveless], and so on.

F: He was not at his sharpest.

S: No; it looked as if he'd really been through a night and apparently he had, and at that time he announced that Lyndon Johnson was his choice. This was a seemingly logical choice in terms of the number of votes at the convention, and also in the sense of the South. In my own view, considering the closeness of the election and the

strong feelings the South had for my father as expressed in these interminable bus rides back and forth with these delegates, as well as impressions gained at delegate caucuses, Dad could have done as well or better in the South. First, Missourians are not Yankees. There's hope for them in southern eyes. Secondly, they are not so southern that their alliance with a Kennedy would have seemed so much like a capitulation as Lyndon's.

At the outset, at the very beginning, until the campaign got off the ground, this marriage of convenience pleased very few in either camp. I went out to Disneyland the next day to try and put things in perspective, and ran into California delegates, Ohio delegates, Pennsylvania and New York delegates. They all said, "The world's coming to an end." Then I ran into some southern delegates, including Texas delegates, and they said that, "We can't understand Lyndon."

Now there's no point in repeating what I've read. But I guess that Lyndon's own prescience, and the advice he may have gotten from Rayburn and others, including Lady Bird, encouraged him to accept. Kennedy had to have had some similar advice just to make the offer. So the two just met and locked in, and that was it.

F: Your father wasn't telephoned by Kennedy to be told that he was being passed by?

S: That I don't know. Kennedy would have had to have made a lot of

calls.

F: There were a number of people who were waiting.

S: I think, for example, Orville Freeman certainly thought that he was in contention. Mr. Scoop Jackson, I don't know, maybe. But, there were one or two others, at least. And I had the impression during the primaries--we'd go into a state like Iowa, and there'd be Governor Loveless [Herschel Cellel], Docking [Robert Blackwell] of Kansas, to name two. You'd go into those states, and these fellows would be living in sort of an afterglow of a recent Kennedy visit, definitely wearing what appeared to be vice presidential dream hats.

F: Sort of like those jokes about the number of bank vice presidents.

S: I had the feeling that all these guys really began reading themselves into that portrait, thinking about the geographic position of their state and the difference in the cultures of the Midwest and Massachusetts holding things together, never had any problems with Southerners. One thing after another. And I think that this was very carefully orchestrated and played on by the Kennedy forces, so that you got a lot of gubernatorial support that a more straightforward approach might have missed.

F: A good lesson in how to raise hopes without promising anything.

S: Yes. I think a lot of those fellows were sitting by their phones and wondering why they weren't ringing, and I don't think that Kennedy called all those characters. The thing is, his calls were pretty much focused on just getting the number one guy. If, as I

have heard and read that Bob Kennedy was not in it and was for my father and so forth, that may well be true. I never discussed this with Bob, and I never discussed it with my father either, really. He's been very close about all this, and whatever arrangements he had, if there were any, maybe he will tell you, and maybe he will not. My father is very fond of . . . he had a great friendship with Lyndon Johnson, and I think they still are great friends. It was sore tested I suspect in the latter days of their Senate relationship, because I think that Lyndon, being the consummate politician that he is, saw in my father a real threat to, not the second job, which he probably wasn't thinking about himself, but the top one. And thus, things like space and defense that my father was quite good at suddenly slipped out of his hands and ended up in Lyndon's. Which is par for the course.

F: Yes.

S: And then there was an article, I must confess. Was it in Harper's? By White. Not Theodore White. William S. White, who is an old crony of President Johnson. It was really quite a vicious going over of the old man. I don't know if you've ever seen it. It was pretty bad. I don't know. I've seen others that are just as bad about everybody. We weren't used to it, I guess, as much as some of the others.

F: You hadn't developed your scar-tissue yet.

S: No, I wasn't quite ready for that kind of thing. The old man read that, and I think he felt it ensued from a rid-me-of-that-

man type of thing. That may have affected his feelings; that's all. But since 1960 another nine years have gone by. I think he's a much more sophisticated man than he was then.

F: Well now, by 1960, the Symingtons and the Johnsons were sort of family friends, weren't they?

S: Oh, yes.

F: And there was some visitation back and forth?

S: I think long before 1960, because they've been friends since 1945 or 1946 or 1947 or so.

F: And they saw each other some socially, and you were at least on the fringe of this?

S: Yes, I used to see them together quite frequently, and they were pretty good pals, and my folks were very fond of Lady Bird, too. They liked them both, and I think they saw, even at that early stage, how much she meant to him in every way and what a wonderful character she has.

F: Did Senator Johnson ever encourage you, as a bright young man, to seek a political career, or did he ever talk, or pay you any particular attention?

S: He was just marvelously genial and gracious to me, but I don't really remember that well anything that he might have said.

F: He never tried to be the avuncular type to you?

S: Not particularly. We didn't have that much opportunity for that. He just loved to kid my father. They kidded each other so much and used me as kind of reflecting board for it, sitting around on

the porch. "Are you going to let your father do this? Are you going to let your father do that?" He may have at one point said, "Are you going to follow your father?"But this I don't remember too well.

After the vice presidential thing was over, I do remember one young fellow from Florida. Dick Hume was his name. He was working as a Young Democrat.

F: That's H-U-M-E?

S: Yes, a message boy. He said that he had been with Bob Kennedy the night before, and that Roosevelt, Jimmy Roosevelt, had come in and said, "Well, who's it going to be? Stuart?" And Bob said, "Who else could it be?" That was another indication that there may have been some division of opinion in the Kennedy ranks as to who it would be or should be. There were some articles about Phil Graham of the [Washington] Post pushing the President. That may be so, too. If Phil Graham [Washington Post publisher] had any concern about my father, as I have read, being an effective executive, I think that he was mistaken, but that argument is said to have been advanced. In any event, we can't ask him now.

F: Yes.

S: So there it was. So then, about a day later, untimely soon you might have thought in a Shakespearean way, Bob Kennedy called and said, "Are you ready to go?".

F: He didn't give you any time to cool, did he?

S: That's right. I had met Bob one or two times during the McCarthy hearings, I think, in 1954, and I had met his sisters. I was

singing in New York during my law school days at a place called the Sherry Netherland Hotel. They all came in right after the elections in 1952. I don't think Bob was with them, but the gals were very nice. Eunice and Jean and Pat, I think, and maybe one or two, maybe Steve [Stephen Smith] was there, I forget, or [Peter] Lawford. In any event, I met the gang then, and we kind of compared notes because Jack had just been elected for the first time, and we fooled around talking about it. So I didn't really know Bob too well; he was overshadowed by Roy Cohn and McCarthy and the other great characters; but he was working on the committee. His association, ideologically, religion and otherwise, with McCarthy was one I never discussed with him, and never really understood. I know that he was somewhat defensive about McCarthy from time to time, whereas Dad, who has nothing against anybody in the world, was very concerned about what McCarthy was doing, and took him on at those hearings. We got a lot of obscene phone calls, a lot of trouble, and plenty of opposition for it in his next race for the Senate in 1958. Then in 1960 there were still people who were more or less pro-McCarthy who were worried about. . .

F: Who didn't forget.

S: . . . Dad's performance there. But of course I think that it was really one of the high-water marks of his public life, the way he sat him down two or three times. "I'm not afraid of you." I remember him saying that. And as John Crosby, the TV commentator wrote: not

too many people could or would say that to McCarthy. Cohn, at the time, after a day of vicious testimony, would come up to the old man, because I think that the Jewish community always felt that Dad understood their problems, and I'm sure that some people were telling Cohn, "Don't go after Symington like that." He'd come up to him and say, "Did I say anything wrong today, Senator?"

I was then in law school.

F: Work on you all day and then come back and placate you.

S: Yes. Well, Joe McCarthy was the same way, because I remember one time he had Cohn on the stand, and he was asking him, "Would it explain Senator Symington's attitude at these hearings if you knew that he was a golf-playing crony of a card-carrying Communist, William Sentner[?]?" And Cohn had the sense not to answer that question. He simply said, "I'm afraid I can't answer that." William Sentner was the guy who ran the union at Emerson Electric. He never played golf with my father, but under the Wagner Act you had to deal with the guy who had the job, and by the time that Dad had instituted the profit-sharing plan, the dues checkoff, and union shop, there was nothing left for Sentner to do but be kicked out, which he then was, by his own men. Then you'd get in the elevator; McCarthy is waiting in the elevator after a statement like that, and he'd say, "Hi, Stu. How are you? How you doing?" And so the man was really quite an unusual, schizoid type of fellow.

F: I've had some students working on him, and they all come back with

the fact that no one disliked him personally. They may have hated his guts politically, and looked upon him as terribly dangerous, but there was a charm about him. And he thought that shredding a man was just part of the game and had nothing to do with personality.

S: Yes. Well, I was in law school at the time. I'd walk down the street; I lived on 103rd, and I'd walk up to 116th on the West Side at Columbia, and normally the streets would be bustling and full of noises and things. You couldn't hear a thing except the radios and the TV coming out of the windows of all these apartment buildings, and it was the same all over the city, because the city realized that something big was happening. I'd go get my clothes from the cleaners, or groceries or something, and they'd say, "You any relation to the Senator?" And I'd say, "Yes." "Good boy, good boy; hang in there." Because they were worried that their life was going to undergo a fundamental change if this guy had his way. So I really felt great in that period. Now what Bob's feelings were at that time about McCarthy, I don't know.

In any event, a day or so after the convention, he did call and asked for my help. I went out, worked about twenty states, and wrote my reports for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, working mostly with young people's groups, going into universities. Not confined to that, but a lot of that, and mostly Midwest. I spent a good deal of time arguing that a man's religion should be no bar to any office. I couldn't understand what they were all afraid of.

That's when I first met George McGovern. Went up to South Dakota and campaigned with him. I must say he is a charming, good man,

regardless of any differences that I might have with him. On matters involving priorities for national resources, I don't have too many differences. There were times when I thought that his timing on Vietnam and some other things may have been just a little different than mine.

Anyway, it was out of that relationship, which I thank Bob Kennedy for establishing, that I was later offered the post of deputy director of Food for Peace. McGovern was defeated by Mundt by 14,000 votes because Kennedy lost the state by 60,000. It was a strongly Lutheran state with a somewhat conservative point of view. McGovern was subsequently offered the directorship of Food for Peace and, checking with the President I'm sure, he offered me the second slot.

During that campaign, I went all over the place, reporting in to Bob Kennedy, Dick Donahue and Larry O'Brien. A very good, competent crowd they were. But my job was pretty much impossible. I went up to states like Wisconsin, for example, which the Kennedys had poured themselves into in the primary, I went up there in the general, rather expecting to find a tremendous base. Well, the people would come to me and say, "Now where's the money, where are the stickers, and where are the buttons?" There was nothing, because the Kennedys dropped them like a cold potato once they got their primary out of the way, and Wisconsin carried, I think easily, for Nixon. It was strange how you could have such a flame of support for a guy within, admittedly, the Democratic Party, and thento find later that there's just nothing left

to fight with. There were two fellows there who fought between themselves all the time: [Ivan] Nestingen, the mayor of Madison, Wisconsin, and [Patrick Joseph] Pat Lucey. Lucey is now the executive director of this National Democratic Coalition; it's a Kennedy-McGovern crowd. And Evjue, the publisher of the Madison paper, an old man named Evjue. [William T. Evjue, publisher of the Madison Capital Times.]

F: Was that the Capital Times?

S: Something like that. Anyway, Evjue gave quite an insight into McCarthy: Back before McCarthy was even known he sat with a few priests saying, "What would make a good issue?" And one of them said, "How about Communism? A suggestion he came to regret according to Evjue. But Evjue was a man who stayed on McCarthy's back for years, never trusted him, and never liked him. I met him during that primary period and had some fascinating talks with him.

During that period I never encountered any discussion in either Kennedy or Johnson's group about the other. I think during the campaign they held their tongues pretty well on that score, knowing that there was nothing to be gained by backbiting.

F: Now, in the area in which you campaigned, the Midwest and upper Midwest, did you have to defend the choice of Johnson, or was all of this positive enough that you just went in on a Kennedy-Johnson ticket, and that what you sold?

S: That's what I sold. I don't recall really having to defend him.

F: Johnson was not an onus, in fact, in that case?

S: No, not really, not at all, as I recall. I think once people got used to it, they figured, well, his job is to hold the South, or at least enough of it.

F: Did Johnson himself, or his particular group, ever contact you during the campaign?

S: Not during the campaign period. Where they actually were I'm not sure. I don't know how they organized the Johnson support in the general campaign.

F: I probably should give you some insight on that.

S: There must be a thousand stories of how this happened or failed to happen in many different states, and you probably know a lot of them, but I don't. I didn't really run across the tracks of the Johnson campaigners at all. I read about it, but I never encountered it.

F: Now, you're a bright young lawyer, and you're very well known in Missouri, and you've got other possibilities. Why did you drop that to go with Food for Peace?

S: Well, I wanted to come in. I was excited about the change of government in 1961 and 1960.

F: I think at least all Democrats felt that they were on the threshold of something.

S: Yes, well, I think the country was ready for a more active government, after eight years of Eisenhower, a sort of lovable, quiescent person, and after watching problems build up around the

world, problems which were great, but did not appear to be insoluble, which appeared rather amenable to swift solutions if we simply put our minds to it.

F: Just needed somebody to get in there and work.

S: Just needed somebody to get in there and have at it. I had already written a paper for my father recommending something in the nature of a Peace Corps. I had suggested on in the private sector, sister city relationships with the developing world, and so forth, and getting people at the grass roots interested in other countries, all toward the idea of understanding and peace. I'd been to Russia in 1958 on a tour, and I could tell these people, the ones I talked to, average citizens, they didn't want war. The first question that they'd always asked was, "America hochet voennoo", which is, "America wants war?" And I'd say, "No. What the hell do we have to gain from it?" And they'd say, "Oh, that's what we hope." They were almost like children saying, "Are you going to hit me?" They were smothered by propaganda from Pravda and the radio. Even in the churches, loudspeakers were making propaganda announcements. But I could tell they didn't believe it.

They wanted to know how many man hours it took me to buy my shirt and my shoes. They weren't interested in dollars or rubles because all of those fake numbers meant nothing. It was much work one had to do and I thought: this is what everyone in the world is interested in; so, when I saw us moving across the threshold of

1960-61, I thought: here is our chance, finally, to wipe out a lot of past mistakes, get going with our resources. We were not then in a major war anyplace. We had survived the U2 incident in the Soviet Union, which had actually set back our relations with them a little bit, because the Russians historically fear intrusions on their territory. In any event, I thought that we were ready to go with something useful. So I wanted to come into the government. I didn't ask for any particular job, or any job.

If I had not been offered an appropriate job I probably would have gone back into law practice back home, or something like that. I may have stayed here, but I may have gone home, depending on how I would have viewed my by then incipient political interests.

But George said, "I'd like you to come with me," and I went with him. And it was an exciting beginning; we were already searching for an office as the President was being inaugurated. We found a suite in the Executive Office Building. I had General MacArthur's old office, which is a room about four times as big as the one we're in now, and it had a whole bunch of phone-lines coming in through the floor. It was his command center.

We began by looking at what was then Public Law 480, "The Use of Food in Economic Development Overseas," which was a Humphrey idea, actually, as I think the Peace Corps was first publicly an idea of Humphrey's. Humphrey has a lot of ideas which other people got hold of. And we decided the government had what might be

called the disposal or garbage theory of surplus foods, rather than how can we help, what can we usefully do? Then I took a mission of five fellows to Latin America within a week of Kennedy's inauguration, it was the first such commission dispatched under his administration. The mission brought to me, especially in the light of Rockefeller's disastrous tour, what good and useful conversations you can have at the right level, if you're not blowing too many horns and ringing too many cymbals.

F: I'll tell you something about that in a minute when we get through.

S: Right. Okay. And I came back, and we worked together, George and I. George got hepatitis at that same time going to Brazil, but he got it from the White House needle, because it was viral and you can't get that any other way. There was a little flak about that at the time. I think they throw their needles away now; maybe they did then, but that was rather a sad way to get hepatitis. In any event, I had to carry much more of the load in that period because George was very ill in Georgetown Hospital. He's made a terrific recovery, but he was in really bad shape, and I had to hold the first meeting.

We had a Food for Peace Council, Mrs. Roosevelt, George Meany, James Michener, Marion Anderson, Bishop Pike and Jim Patten, and many others knowledgeable in matters of food, nutrition, and the problems of less fortunate people. We really geared up this country's interest in combatting world hunger.

I traveled all over the place. I had fascinating experiences with people in the food trades and in agriculture. For just one example, in the state of Washington I went out to Seattle to talk to a bunch of farmers there. They were rather well-to-do. Some of them farmed a thousand acres with three men with giant equipment. And after my formal presentation they said, privately, we'd like to ask you, why is it that Canada can sell half a billion bucks worth of wheat to the Chinese, Red Chinese, and we can't? And they added, if you tell anyone that we asked, we'll deny it, but we'd just like to know. And I said: well, it's just our public policy for the time being. One with which I did not particularly agree, because I thought if the Chinese wanted to turn their scarce resources into food it would be better than putting them into hardware and letting another couple of billion people die of starvation for the fatherland.

But that was in 1961, you see, eight years ago, and it's taken such a long time, such a wrenching long time, to come to these new realizations. You just can't ignore 800 million people. There's no point in giving Russia the confidence to believe that we would never soften our attitude toward China, because that makes it easier for Russia to play games in Czechoslovakia and other parts of the world, Hanoi and so on. The minute Nixon decided to go to Rumania--bang! Obviously that's a door to Peking. Clearly, whether they use it for that is not important, if it's there. Just like

Laird saying it isn't their intentions, but their capabilities on the ABM that we should worry about. The other way around, but it's there.

The minute he goes, Gromyko says, "We want better relations." That speech has two purposes. One is that it hardens the opposition to the ABM, quite clearly, And although Herman Kahn, who defends the ABM, said the Russians want us to have the ABM--that's the defense of the Hudson Institute Foreign Affairs Journal, to make us feel good about it--because the Russians like us to build defensive systems; nevertheless, the effect of Gromyko's speech is to soften the support for the ABMs, and also to try and head off our posse from joining the Chinese.

So, all these things are coming to roost, and I think it's good. I think that the initiatives that can be taken in this regard are much more saleable under a Republican president, because we Democrats, as you know, are fuzzy liberals. Whereas Republicans are pragmatic, and when they do something, it's time to do it. It's economically wise and feasible. And so, reapprochment under a Republican administration, ironically, may be more feasible domestically, politically here, than under the Democrats. I think.

F: Reminds me of the very wealthy Texas oil Republican, one time, who advocated re-opening relations with China, and two or three people gasped, and said, "Now you sound like a Communist." He

looked at them very baldly and said, "Hell, 700 million customers intrigue me."

S: Yes. My father once told me of a wistful spearmint executive who said, "Just think, 500 million jaws working just for you every day."

F: Well, the ideology may be wrong, but the practicality is unassailable in this case.

S: Right. Two points. The committee system here, which is supposed to enlighten the whole Congress on all issues, and develop them in depth, and provide needed legislation, obviously becomes too calcified to do that, because of entrenched attitudes in leadership in the committees. So one of the things that the Democratic Study Group is doing--you know, I joined the group and there's nothing particular involved in joining, other than being able to affiliate with what you want to in that group. I don't agree with a lot that various members of it say. But one of the things that we are going to try to do is to set up our own committees and invite experts to talk to us about China, East-West trade, the works. And East-West trade is what you just referred to.

West Europe does about ten billion bucks a year with East Europe, and we, in the name of protecting the integrity of the free world, won't do any. I've a friend in Missouri who wanted to sell an asphalt plant to Bulgaria, and the Commerce Department didn't think that it was possible under the law. So the Italians

sold one to them instead. It's not as good, costs twice as much, and is half as productive and we lost the business. Beat that.

Well, with this we're getting a little far afield, but I think that our trade policies and our wage-price spirals here are going to create a series of interesting problems for this country, in steel, in shoes, and in cars, to name three. The wage differential is so great that unless we have some tariff support, imports will displace domestically produced stuff to a dangerous degree. Secondly, our entrepreneurs, being answerable to their stockholders, invest in the foreign companies. If this is pattern becomes dominant, you'll have jobless Americans relying on welfare from taxes of profits made by U.S. business abroad in the low-labor areas. I don't know whether this is a real threat now, but I can see it could happen someday. Anyway, I think the one way to prevent that kind of thing is for us to have intelligent trade policies with the whole world. And if there are things that we can make, like computers, better than anyone and cheaper than anyone, and there are countries which want to buy them, I say, "Let's sell them."

It was Alexander Hamilton, not a notorious liberal, who once said, "Trade is the road to peace." Once you get in a relationship with a country where you're interdependent, and the country produces things your people like to use, you're less likely to want to clobber them. The more detached you are, the less you have

to lose if you knock them off. The more related you are, the more you have to lose. So let's relate. I feel this way strongly, and I think that this is the way President Johnson must have felt, and President Kennedy felt. I think that President Johnson was trying to lower the barriers to East-West trade, but always walking on eggs for fear of the U.S. reaction, public reaction.

Now Nixon in his first speech, his inaugural, said, "No nation can be kept in angry isolation. We will open doors." And I thought, "What do you know, he's ready." Well, then he gave some rather negative statements on China and East-West. But now he goes to Rumania, and the papers that jump him for going, I think, are premature. Don't criticize him until you know how it shakes out. He could get there and say very useful things. One such useful thing might be that we want to improve our relations with the Soviet Union. But then he could also say, "China, too, we're not against anyone." So, he could handle it in such a way as to make it a plus, or he could bomb out. I hope he doesn't do that, but he could bomb out by not going and saying some things, too.

Going to Rumania, is a good idea, I think It is long past due that we're doing these things. I'm sorry I got off on this stuff.

F: That's good, that's good, because one of the purposes of this is to capture the times, and this is part of the times, and these things, of course, don't creep up on us overnight; they are a long time in the making. Well, to get back, did you have any contact at all with the now-Vice President during your Food for Peace Program? Was this part of his concern in any way?

S: I've no doubt he was interested in the program, but it really was an internecine struggle with which Vice President Johnson had very little, if anything, to do.

It was between AID, under a series of guys, Fowler Hamilton, maybe Labouisse before that, maybe [David] Bell later, and then Orville Freeman in Agriculture, because it was the philosophy and the practical politics of U.S. surplus disposition. George McGovern, being staff to the President, for a while had the ear of the President, until the tide took over. You may call and people say "Who's calling?" "The White House is calling." And someday someone says, "Who in the White House is calling." And then your castle of cards collapses because, "Oh it's George McGovern. Well, may I take a message?" Or, "I'll call you back." Because the line agencies that have the resources and the dough to spend and the cabinet officer's heading, they really are going to run it. We provided some initiative the first six months, and some ideology, and some new-think to some old bureaucrats and bureaucratic practices, and I think actually geared up the school

lunch program in the world, definitely under Title II, Title III. The food for work ideas was under Title IV, and proposed that our government use food as a part wage to people of other nationalities working on infrastructure matters. That way foreign workers can put their twenty cents into shoes instead of food. Their wage is supplemented by U.S. wheat, largely corn. There were difficulties in the effort to get Bulgur wheat into rice-deficient areas as a substutite for rice, because of taste problems, and cultural background, but the plan worked I think. And now I think that the sales of Bulgur wheat under PL480 are greatly increased, Title I sales. I think it's also a larger percent of the give-away program. I haven't really followed it recently too well.

So McGovern was caught in the crunch between Freeman and AID, Hamilton maybe. There was an old bureaucrat in AID who was a tough nut, Fitzgerald I think his name was. He just knew what he wanted the food for and how it could be used. And then you had toughies in Agriculture, Ray Ioanes and a crowd right under the Secretary, answerable immediately to the Congress, of course, the Agricultural Committee, and Poage, and so forth, who were really agriculture oriented. The effort that was made at that time to put Food for Peace in the Foreign Aid Program per se would never succeed, because Agriculture won't let go. They want the authority to determine how much surplus you're going to have in . . the first place. And then they want the authority to determine how

and to what extent we will influence world market, including our own, through the use of donated food, or food at less than cost. So Agriculture doesn't want to let go of any part of it.

The State Department wants to be involved, because they don't want Argentina and Australia and France and other food exporting countries breathing down our necks because of our free food policies. So we have what they call "maintaining global markets."

We had an inter-agency Food for Peace Committee, with representatives of all the relevant agencies in the government, that met about once a week to discuss all the latest requests, whether Title I, II, III, or IV food contracts with our government. And then, maybe three out of four agencies would approve it, and the fourth would say we just can't go with this because of this, that, or the other. It was a fascinating study in bureaucracy, for me. It was a great education. But Johnson wasn't involved in that.

Now during this period, because you asked earlier, sure I would encounter Kennedy; I went to the Kennedy parties and that kind of thing. The hostilities, usually expressed in irony and humor, of the campaign period were very much alive. But having, from the Kennedy point of view, conquered, it wasn't the subject of daily conversation, just when the name was mentioned there would be some aside, a flippant aside, that's all. No one dwelt on the subject.

In those days, I didn't yet know the Johnson folks too well because they were just not much in evidence. I wouldn't have had a chance to know them unless they got involved in my work.

This was the year 1961-1962, and in 1962 McGovern decided to run for the Senate. That left me with a choice: do I stay, break in a new political appointee as Food for Peace Director or, cognizant of the fact that the office itself has lost a lot of its punch, do I move on, or go into another agency? Somehow I felt rather protective of the uniqueness of Food for Peace. Not wanting it to be absorbed into a more institutionalized point of view. On the other hand, I thought that I just had to go up somehow, or out.

Well, it was at this time that John Siegenthaler, who was Bob Kennedy's administrative assistant, who'd been conked on the head down in Birmingham in a bus-in, quit to go back and run his paper in Nashville. And Bob offered me the job as his administrative assistant. They knew that I had to decide to leave government, stay, move, or something. I accepted, knowing that to be that close to the President's brother, the Attorney General, would be a view of United States government available to very few. And so I took it, and went in with him.

I want to quickly say: I have never heard him [Bob Kennedy] say anything detrimental about President Johnson. He may have reserved such comments to closer confidants than I might have been,

because after all, I hadn't come in as an old prep school roommate.

F: It wasn't the sort of thing that just spilled over in casual conversations?

S: Not from him. I had heard stories, for example, that in the organization of an equal opportunity committee, that President Johnson worked on things, the then-Vice President made a report, and that Bobby really read him off, said that isn't sufficient, that's not good enough. This apparently to his face in a committee. Whether or not that actually happened, I don't know. I heard that it did, but he was, it seemed to me, broader. He kept a lot of things pretty close to his chest, in his attitudes and feelings about people. I think Bob did.

The year I spent with him was a most interesting year. 1962-63 was the year of the Cuban missile crisis and the Mississippi University crisis, and I was very much involved in both of them. During the missile crisis I used to bring Ambassador Dobrynin up that back elevator about two, or three times a week to talk with Bob.

There was also a funny bouncy little Russian, named Georgi Borshakov, who was rather genial, to the point of clownishness. He had ingratiated himself--he was, I think, in the Public Affairs section of the Soviet Embassy--with a lot of officials. Bob Kennedy got to like this little Borshakov and wanted to take him out on the Sequoia one time, He invited John McCone, then the head of the CIA. McCone asked for the list and saw this guy was on it and

declined, obviously not caring to be around him: why do you sit around with Russians if you don't have to, if you've got the job he did?

F: Right.

S: At least not under those circumstances. If he wants to come and see him, that's something else, Anyway, this little fellow used to pop in and out in advance of the missile crisis, too. I have the impression that he might have been the fellow that brought the letter from Khrushchev denying that there were missiles in Cuba. These are totally undocumented and unsupported thoughts I have. Yet, I'm not sure Dobrynin knew as much as Borshakov may have known. I think perhaps Borshakov was used as the agent to carry a message, which was not known to Dobrynin, denying that there were missiles. Now to what extent that could have affected our policies, I don't know. I do know that suddenly we stopped seeing Borshakov. After the missile crisis was over, he was sent home.

Georgi Borshakov. And he just walked in and out of the Justice Department just as happy as the little jester that he seemed to be. And if he was doing something sinister, that was dangerous. And whether Bob understood how dangerous, I don't know. Maybe he was ahead of him. Or perhaps he thought that he was really getting through to the Soviet government more effectively using this guy as against Dobrynin. I don't know.

F: Borshakov and Dobrynin really ran separate tracks?

S: Yes, I had the impression that that was so, though they may have been coordinating.

F: Sort of like the Japanese on the eve of Pearl Harbor.

S: Yes. I've never bothered to pursue it. Maybe you can, but with the Soviet desk or something, if they remember that.

It's inconceivable--well, no, it's not inconceivable that Dobrynin would not know all of the intelligence activities of his own government, because if you are as distrustful a government as you'd have to be to be the Soviet government, you'd give certain information to your ambassador and certain information to somebody else who reports in another way. Not that you trust either guy more, necessarily, but that you get double information and parallel opportunities. Then you can spot discrepancies and then you can question why are these discrepancies, and so forth, rather than just reposing all your trust in one guy whose laziness or inefficiency might produce inaccurate information. I say laziness and inefficiency, not disloyalty.

F: Kind of an intellectual laziness, in some ways.

S: Yes.

F: Taking things on trust.

S: This is something that I'd love to know more about. In any event I don't. But I used to worry when I saw this fellow pop in and out, because I wondered what he could have that was so useful for us.

Those were difficult times.

There was a Puerto Rican Peace Corps meeting, and I think Lyndon Johnson was sent to participate in that. It seemed to me that Bob Kennedy had to realize that Lyndon Johnson could play certain important roles, and they didn't think of him of just as a make-work guy. They realized that he had certain clout and intelligence factors which they could use constructively.

It's really more the supporters of people that cut at the other guy than the guy himself. They don't have to deal with him; they don't have to trust him; they don't have to administer his work, and they don't have to be responsible for the work product. So that's your journalist friends, your old prep-school buddies, your artists, your sculptors, your painters, and so on. And so that's where all the talk goes.

But people like Johnson and Kennedy had much too important work to do, to get all socked into that kind of conversation.

The Oxford crisis was the other big thing, and that was another story. I don't recall that Lyndon Johnson had a role to play in that, so I don't know whether you want to--

F: There was some talk that, during the Jack Kennedy years, Johnson and Bobby were sort of vying to see who could get credit for the most, say, empathy with the civil rights movement.

S: Oh, I see. Well, then, they kept him out of that. For example, I've never thought of even asking the question, but why wasn't Johnson used to talk to Barnett at some point. Obviously, he could talk to him with a greater background of mutual understanding of problems than

Bobby could. When Bobby talked with him over the phone, Barnett was quite intransigent. He [Barnett] wanted the marshals to be sure to draw all their guns, otherwise it wouldn't be credible for him to step aside or for his troopers to step aside. It had to appear that the integration of the University was being brought about by the overwhelming force of the Federal Government.

F: First-class confrontation.

S: Yes. He wanted this, and Bob thought it was dangerous. But he, with his New England twang, talking to this Southern Governor that he's never met over the telephone, with Burke Marshall and Katzenbach standing by Bob, and Barnett surrounded by seven-foot state troopers, is not really conducive to a defusing of the situation.

As it turned out the Federals fooled the Mississippi authorities by bringing Meredith in a day ahead of time, I think, and putting him in a different place. He was not in the Faculty Club, he was in another place, but protesters surrounded the Faculty Club.

I was there the very next morning after the riot. President Kennedy got on the radio the previous evening at eight o'clock saying let's cool it. But by then they were already throwing Coke bottles filled with gasoline at the marshals [?] and there were a lot of rednecks that came in from outside, from Alabama and Florida. I went down the next morning.

F: Why were you sent?

S: I was sent just to help.

F: As a man from the Justice Department?

S: Yes, as a sort of personal representative of Bob. He had Katzenbach down there running the thing. I had no specific portfolio.

F: You were free to range.

S: Yes, fully free to range and to see how I could be helpful. As it turned out, three days after the riot, young troops were patrolling the streets. They were being razzed by the young students. "If you weren't so dumb, you wouldn't be in the Army." Very tense. And it's interesting in the light of today's student riots and everybody's saying that there shouldn't be any federal interference in these things. Well, the shoe was on the other foot then, and you had what you might call a conservative riot. And would they take the same position that the campus should be run by the university? The university had absolutely abdicated any thought of sustaining the court's order. There was a complete vacuum of power. I went down, as I said, the next day and spent two or three days interviewing students who had been apprehended with firearms in their automobiles and asking them why they did this. And they said, "Well, that's what my preacher told me, it's not right to have the colored here, and that's what my papa told me." Well, you see, a lot of the kids would live at home and go to the university, and if that's what your papa and your preacher tell you, and your college is silent, you accept.

F, Plus the fact that it was right at the beginning of school, and they'd all just left home.

S: Yes. They'd all just left home. It was right in September. It became a cause. One fellow said, "Well, I was up in my room studying; the phone rang; it was my folks, and they said, 'What's happening?' I said, 'There's a riot, but I'm up in my room working.' They said, 'You get out there and defend your state like those other boys.'" So this is what I gleaned and wrote reports on.

Then I went to see all the ministers in the area, because the Sunday following they all had to say something about it. They couldn't quite ignore it, and some of them were brave enough to say that they thought that it was ill-advised, both from a religious point of view and a practical point of view, to confront the authorities in this way. And all these fellows were now hiding, practically, behind barricaded doors in their parish houses, because the community was so sore at them for not giving total support to the Governor. It would be interesting to find out where those guys are now and whether they hung on to their jobs.

There was one bright-eyed segregationist minister, who said that it's all right there in the book, the sons of Cain and the sons of Ham if you understand your Bible, and so forth. So he had great peace of mind on the subject and total community support. He said the Federal government was a tyranny. I asked him how his state government must appear to the Negro, and he said, "It's better to have a lot of little tyrannies than one big one."

One thing I did, that I think was quite helpful, was to address the Lions Club of Oxford, consisting of most of the businessmen and sub-professionals in Oxford. They wanted a speaker from the Federals on the Thursday following the Sunday riot. They came in and asked, and I was there with Katzenbach and the head of the Anti-Trust Division, and I said, "I'll do it." So I went to lunch that day at the Lions Club in Oxford, and it was an awkward feeling to go into the group of folks whose community you virtually occupy.

F: Yes.

S: The press and TV wanted to come, but I said no. And, at first I kept my remarks light. I told a story about Nero watching the lions eating the Christians, and how this one guy kept stepping up and whispering in the lion's ear, and the lion slink away. And Nero says, "Bring me that man." The gladiator comes up, and Nero says, "What have you got with these lions?" And the fellow said, "I simply remind them, sire, that after they've eaten they'll be asked to speak." Well, that was my opening.

And I said, "You're probably wondering why we're here," and went through, very carefully, how the matter had progressed to the point that it had through the courts, that we finally had to decide whether the government had an obligation, or could simply consider it too tough and forget it. Then I mentioned that, yes, they are examining cars, and I said I had made a suggestion that they check the oil and gas while they do this, but this was vetoed by the commanding officer.

The Mayor got up and said, "I just want you to know that we didn't really want this fellow in school here very much, but we wanted the violence and the damage less than that." He said, "I can't use the word grateful, but we're not unhappy that there are troops keeping the peace here. We have shops and trades, and we've got to get our work done, and we regret the whole thing, but we just want you to know that there isn't the kind of hard feeling that you might expect."

One fellow then asked me to dinner that night. So I went out, walked the streets of Oxford, thinking I'd get knocked off any minute. I went to this fellow's house. It was filled with young people in their thirties, and he met me with a big milkglass full of bourbon. I said, "Can I have a piece of ice?" And he said, "We don't water our drinks." Then he said, "We're going to have squirrel." They had all these squirrels in Reynolds Wrap in the oven, and they'd bring them out and open up in Reynolds Wrap, and you'd eat your squirrel. They watched me very closely as I was doing this. The important thing is to get the brain out with a lobster fork and eat it without flinching, which I did, because I sort of put myself in a yoga trance and put the white glob way back in my throat. Then I was all right! By that time of course, we had drunk the bourbon...

F: That boy will do, right?

S: They had a guitar there, and I sang some songs for them. By this time they were very loose and sentimental. They were saying, "You know we love our colored. We love them." And I said, "Well

if you love them, why don't you let them go to school with you?" "Well, you just don't understand, you don't understand."

There was no ill-feeling in it. The fellow that held the party actually was a stringer for the Memphis Commercial Appeal. He had written the article about my talk, or was about to write it, because that was the same day. I really felt if we could just get drunk and laugh and cry together more often, we could work some of these things out.

I came back to Washington, and I saw Senator Stennis, and he came up to me, and he said, "I just want you to know, you've created a very fine impression in my state." And I said, "Well thank you, Senator. I hope things can cool off."

I told Bob [Kennedy] that Stennis had said that, and Bob just shook his head with no expression at all, as if to indicate that it would be impossible to say the right thing in Mississippi and be accepted. I think this was his flaw, to preach rather than persuade when you disagreed, or to state your opinion icily and take the consequences, be it a bullet, a tomato, or whatever it is. There's a certain moxie in that point of view, but I don't think it is the chemistry of human communication.

F: It doesn't reconcile differences.

S: The thing is that we've been through [the Civil War]. I had ancestors on both sides of that conflict, I read their lives, and they were both great fellows. And I have a feeling that if they'd just had a chance to meet in a different way, before that

kind of a line was drawn, and could have maybe seen a little better into the future, they could have avoided the conflict and freed the slaves besides, in due course.

I just don't like wars very well as a solution, and I like it less now with the kind of stuff we've got going. And if you can't as leaders in our own country, communicate with our own people, short of confronting them in doorways and then waiting for Quick-Draw McGraw to end the thing, how in the hell can we do it anywhere else in the world? You hear so many guys saying we don't know the Russians; well you don't know anybody, you don't know anybody if you don't know how to know people. I just hope that somehow in our educational system and the way we bring each other up in this country, we become sufficiently sensitive to people to be able to find the thing that unites them and then grab that and hang on for dear life, and let the thing that divides wither. That's possible. I felt that the Oxford confrontation--well, again, history not revealing--could have been handled another way. I realize that in Barnett you had too little a man to deal with.

F: You've got a problem where he's not very bright.

S: Yes.

F: And I think that he wasn't.

S: There wasn't enough there. I visited some of the journalists in outlying areas. You know, Hodding Carter. I talked to some lawyers, too, and most of them said Barnett was nothing until

this thing came along, that he was absolutely at the end of his political trail, and you've made him into a hero. "Do you realize that?" And they said: here's a guy that we've been just waiting for him to finally fall, and "now you've canonized him." Now, if that is anywhere near true, we must have bungled the thing somehow. It's not a situation that can elevate a man like that; it's the lousy handling of a situation that can do it. Anyway, we got through that one somehow. One of the funniest things and most interesting things, was that the fellow that plays Mark Twain, Hal Holbrook, was there giving his soliloquies.

F: What a piece of timing.

S: He was there a couple of days after the riot for a one night stand. I was fascinated, because I knew Mark Twain's expressed views on blacks, on slavery, and on white hypocrisy and so forth. And so I thought, "Wow, is he going to use that stuff?" So I went, and the place was packed. He must have had about eight or nine hundred youngsters in there, and Holbrook was giving precisely those monologues, and they loved it. He would say the thing that really went home, and they laughed helplessly, cheered, clapped, slapped their thighs. Then he left, and I thought, "My God, they understand the problem." Then they would go out, catch sight of Meredith, and say, "Go home you blankety blank. So they just couldn't translate into their own immediate perspective what they had already accepted artistically and dramatically. Maybe some of them did; I can't say that they all didn't.

It would have been a good idea to have interviewed every single student who was at that university at that time, and then again a year later. We might have learned more about what's going to happen in the South than in any other way, or at least in that part of the South. I think that the general long-term effect was to soften opposition to perfectly ordinary ideas, like going to school together, and that's something.

F: Shall we close it here and come back again.

S: I think that we ought to try it again sometime.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview 1]

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Date

acting James E. O'Neill
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