EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BRODER

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Interviewer
Stephen Knott

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TRANSCRIPT

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Knott: Can you give us some sense of your first interactions with Senator Kennedy, when you first started covering him or coming into contact with him on a semi-regular basis?

Broder: Well, it wasn't on a semi-regular basis, but I first encountered him in West Virginia in 1960. I was working for the *Washington Star* and had just gone to work there, and one of the first assignments that they gave me was to go out and help with the West Virginia primary. Senior reporters were traveling with Kennedy and [Hubert] Humphrey, so I decided the most useful thing I could do would be to look at what was happening at the local, ground level. I went to Beckley, West Virginia, Raleigh County, which was the home of Senator Robert Byrd and of the United Mine Workers, to see whether the campaign was as one-sided as I expected it to be, in Humphrey's favor, in that part of the world.

It turned out not to be, but the reason was that, among other things, that Ted Kennedy and, oddly enough, Ben Smith—the man who turned out to be the seat warmer between John and Ted Kennedy in Massachusetts—were there and had been given that specific county—a big county politically with a big vote in the Democratic primary. And they were very much on the scene doing the most—this is Ann Broder.

Knott: Steve Knott, nice to meet you. Thanks for having us in your home.

Mrs. Broder: We're delighted.

Broder: They were doing the most basic kind of one-on-one, walking around downtown Raleigh and greeting people, and trying to get the message out that these were not foreign devils but people that you could like and vote for. And that was the first time I had ever met him. He was very young at that point.

Knott: He was about 30, I guess. Not quite 30, 28 in 1960, yes.

Broder: Right. And then I didn't see him again until after he had been elected to the Senate. I did not cover either the primary or the general election up in Massachusetts. So I did not have any dealings with him during his first campaign.

Knott: Any impressions that come to mind when you think of Ted Kennedy, as opposed to his brother Jack [John F. Kennedy]? Do you feel comfortable making any sort of comparison between the two in terms of their strengths and weaknesses?

Broder: I knew them at different stages of their careers, obviously. I had not really covered John Kennedy much during the Senate years. I came to Washington the tail end of '55 and was at the '56 Democratic Convention when he took his run at the Vice Presidency. I was as impressed as anybody was with his great charm and grace in making the fight and then conceding the fight. I mean, he did it perfectly and positioned himself, obviously, well to move to the Presidency. He was not, as I recall—I was working for *Congressional Quarterly* then and spending most of my time on the Hill—he was not particularly a significant player in the Senate in those years. He was already focused on the Presidential thing and was stumping and doing and so on. So I did not deal with him very much as a Senator.

I covered that '60 campaign, and I thought it was a marvelous—I mean, it was my first Presidential campaign, so firsts are always special, but I still thought and still think, in retrospect, that it was an extraordinary campaign on both sides, the energy and just the sheer dynamics of Kennedy's campaigning. As you know, that was before we had all of the security surrounding and enveloping Presidential candidates.

The thing that I remember so vividly is not just the rallies at night, but the way in which, when we'd land at an airport and the motorcade would head into town, there would be people all along the way. People had pulled up their cars along the right-of-way, had their kids sitting on the hoods of the cars. They wanted to see this young man who might be President go by. And [Richard] Nixon had very big crowds as well, but the energy—the jumpers and all the things that you've heard about—that was real. I mean, there was an electricity and a sense of public involvement in politics that you don't often get nowadays with all of the television and everything else.

Knott: Right.

Broder: Politically I thought John Kennedy was much more studied, cautious, conservative than Ted Kennedy turned out to be when he came to the Senate. I mean, they had to drag John Kennedy, kicking and screaming, into dealing with the civil rights revolution. It was not something that he felt as a personal cause, and there was always an arm's length. When the crowd was going crazy, his gesture was always cool it a little bit. I was very struck, in that first primary that I ever covered in West Virginia, at the end of a really tough struggle, on the night of the primary, that Kennedy was not in Charleston. He was back in Washington. He and Jackie [Jacqueline Kennedy] went to a movie, and it was not until he learned that he had actually won the primary that they jumped in the plane and came back to join the people who had worked their ass off to get that victory. I think the unspoken message was, Thanks for what you did, but I've got a limited investment in this myself.

With Ted Kennedy, it's partly that full-throated roar of his, but it's also, I think, just the consistency over the years of his passion for his causes. I think he's a much more gut-level and involved politician and policy guy than his brother was.

Knott: Do you think he's more of an Irish politician?

Broder: Well, he certainly is an Irish politician.

Knott: He strikes me as more of a throwback to Honey Fitz [John Fitzgerald] than Jack was, for instance.

Broder: Yes, I think so. There was really an almost aristocratic side to John Kennedy, which I don't think is there with Ted.

Knott: How well did you know Bobby [Kennedy], in terms of your coverage?

Broder: I'm skeptical that any of—well, I shouldn't say that. Maybe Dick Harwood really knew him as a person. I covered him, but I never had the feeling that I was getting anything other than what he wanted to show to a reporter at any given moment. The thing that I remember most vividly about interviewing Robert Kennedy was that you could ask him a question and he would just sit there absolutely silent. You wondered, did he hear me? Did he just think that was the stupidest question he'd ever been asked and not bother to answer? He used silence, clearly, as a way of intimidating or dealing with questions that he didn't like.

Knott: Please don't do that to us today.

Broder: I'll try not to.

Knott: I'm not sure how well we'd respond.

Broder: I covered a lot of the Presidential campaign, the 85 days, and had the misfortune of being there in Los Angeles when he was killed. That was an extraordinarily emotional thing, partly because of the time and the circumstances, but also the way in which you could see him rising to that moment. A lot of people have said this, but I certainly felt that the tragedy of his death was that there was clearly no way of telling what he would become, because he was changing and growing so dramatically in front of your eyes, and there seemed to be no limit to what his potential was in terms of figuring out for himself what was really important and connecting to a wider and wider range of people.

Knott: Do you recall Ted Kennedy at all during the '68 campaign?

Broder: I do not. The vivid picture that I have of Ted Kennedy during his brothers' campaigns was at the 1960 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles when they were calling the roll. They got down to Wyoming, and they needed the Wyoming votes to end it on the first ballot, and ending it on the first ballot was, in their eyes, extremely important because they weren't sure that they could keep people more than one ballot. I remember seeing Ted Kennedy down on the floor of the convention, in the Wyoming delegation, standing over Tino Roncalio, and you could, even from the press stand, see him mouthing, "Do it. Do it. Do it." I do not recall him in his brother Bob's campaign.

Knott: We heard some reports that Ted Kennedy was opposed to Bobby's run in '68. Did you pick any of that up?

Broder: I certainly didn't.

Knott: Do you have any sense as to why Ted Kennedy ran for this whip position in the Senate? It's always struck me as a somewhat odd development in his career that he would seek a leadership position within the Senate hierarchy.

Broder: I don't recall even what the speculation was at the time about that. I do not know.

Knott: Chappaquiddick comes on the heels of Bobby's death. Shortly after, Ted Kennedy becomes majority whip. Did you cover that? Did you deal with that story at all?

Broder: I dealt with it only from the Washington end. I was not up in Massachusetts. I mean, I remember the effect that that news had on people, and the sort of stunned—I mean, first reaction was, "Oh my God, another Kennedy tragedy." And then as his terrible behavior in the thing became clear, it was devastating to his reputation here.

Knott: Were Democratic colleagues on the Hill sharing this reaction as well?

Broder: I think so. That happened during the summer, and I'm not sure.

Knott: July of '69.

Broder: My recollection is that Congress probably was out during that time, but when they came back, that was certainly *the* topic that people were talking about.

Knott: Was he taken seriously as a Senator, or was he seen as the youngest brother who was riding on his older brothers' coattails?

Broder: I think he had begun, by that point, to achieve a role for himself. It became much clearer as time went on, but no, I think he was beginning to be a force, particularly on some of the issues—healthcare and so on—that he later put his personal stamp on. He was taken seriously, and he was very popular. I mean, one reason that he may have run for whip was that, I think, he was genuinely a popular figure inside the Democratic caucus, and a lot of the Republicans would tell you that they liked him. He was a very agreeable companion, and in the Senate, it's small enough to make a difference.

Knott: We've heard that he was fairly deferential to the old bulls who were still hanging around.

Broder: Very much so. He tells this wonderful story, which I'm sure you've heard, about when he went to call on Jim Eastland to become a member of the Judiciary Committee. You could just see him doing that to that old segregationist.

Knott: Right. He seems to have fit in to the Senate better than either of his brothers. He seems to have taken to it.

Broder: Yes.

Knott: Any sense of?

Broder: I don't know whether it was something that they passed on to him, or whether it was simply that coming to the Senate so young, as he did, he accepted the culture of the Senate as being his new home. But you're absolutely right. He fits the Senate, and he turned out to have a much longer career there and a much more significant career than either of his brothers.

Knott: Is he accessible to the media?

Broder: Yes. He's not a pest, but he's very accessible.

Knott: And you feel, when you are doing a story about him or a piece, that he co-operates—

Broder: He's very accessible, and he's got a press staff that's very professional. Always has. I can't recall at any time, in all the years, that he's had anything other than really capable, cooperative people working for him—not just the press secretaries but the policy people and so on. The only downside is that, as you know, he is not always the most articulate person in explaining his own ideas. Sometimes you have to really labor through a lot of verbiage to get to the nut of the idea.

Knott: Right. I'm wondering, around the time of Chappaquiddick, was there a sense that they were being open and up front, or was there a sense that he and the so-called "Kennedy machine" were stonewalling it?

Broder: Well, they tried, I think, at that point to throw a protective curtain around him. As you recall, he was injured somewhat in the accident himself and was out of the public eye for a time. They, I think, limited the interviews when he first came back to the Senate. Back home, of course, they were working very hard. I was not there, but one heard about all of the efforts that they were making to explain to people in Massachusetts and to create a climate where it was possible then for him to run for reelection, which was really in doubt. I mean, at the time of the accident, people did really question whether he could ever run for public office again.

Knott: Sure, yes.

Lindskog: You said that they took the Senator seriously very early on Capitol Hill, and his staff was very professional. I was wondering if you noticed any changes in him or his staff as he became viable as a Presidential candidate after Robert Kennedy's assassination. Did you notice any changes?

Broder: I think if you went back, which I haven't done at all in recent years, and looked at the way in which he positioned himself on some of the issues, you could see him thinking about the Presidential possibility.

Obviously there was a dynamic that began to develop between him and President [Jimmy] Carter that became an open break. It didn't start as an open break. It started as disagreements about, particularly, especially, economic tax policies and economic growth policies, where Kennedy was arguing a much more populist kind of view than the Carter administration was adopting at that time. Then, of course, it came dramatically into the open at that midterm conference where he made the famous speech.

From that point on, it was pretty clear that he was getting ready, I think. I mean, it was not a surprise, I think, after that midterm, that the breach turned out to be important. Carter made some efforts, as you know, to bring Kennedy back into the fold, but Carter's own political stock was sinking so fast that he had less and less leverage in the situation.

Lindskog: Did you think Senator Kennedy was going to run for the Presidency sooner than 1980? Did you ever get the impression that '68, '72, '76 was a real possibility?

Broder: No. There was an undercurrent at every one of those Democratic Conventions that said, "Give us another Kennedy."

Knott: [George] McGovern wanted him on the ticket in '72.

Broder: Absolutely. It didn't look to me as if, in his mind, it was a serious prospect.

Knott: Fair to say that the Nixon White House was obsessed with Ted Kennedy, or is that an overstatement? You hear some people say the whole Watergate thing, in some ways, was keeping tabs—

Broder: The neuroses were so deep there. I don't know whether it was Kennedy in particular. They saw threats everywhere. I mean, the more we learn about Nixon's mindset, the more amazing it is that, you know—

Knott: He became President?

Broder: I always thought that he was an odd person to be in politics, because he was so—I mean, most politicians like being with other people. They're very gregarious and so on. Nixon was exactly the opposite. He just was totally uncomfortable in just a normal social setting. He didn't know what the hell to talk about or how to relax with people at all. He obviously had a fine mind and would have been a very successful lawyer. He was a successful lawyer for the few years that he spent doing it, but he was a very odd duck to be in politics. It turned out that he brought all of this insecurity with him to the damn White House and drove people crazy there with all of the things that he wanted them to do to stamp out this or that threat that existed mostly in his mind. I don't know whether the Kennedys were a particular obsession of his.

Knott: What are the main issues that Kennedy, as a Senator, has pursued over the time period that you've been in D.C.?

Broder: Healthcare, most obviously, but all of the labor-related issues, almost everything that affects people in their daily lives. He is very much a meat-and-potatoes kind of person. And then his role on the Judiciary Committee, which has probably been his most controversial area, I'm not sure that I can explain exactly why he has chosen the issues that he's chosen there or why he's behaved sometimes in these confirmation hearings in the way that he has. That's probably where the source of his reputation as being harshly partisan comes from.

Knott: Yes. You're thinking of things like the reaction to the [Robert] Bork nomination?

Broder: The Bork nomination and his questioning of these most recent nominees. I mean, he was at or over the line on a lot of the stuff. There was the business about what had happened at that secret society up at Princeton, which went nowhere, and he had no real evidence behind it, and he seemed to be harassing [Samuel] Alito about that, without much basis for doing so. I was not a fan of Alito, but I thought, *Give it a rest, Senator.*

Knott: Can we take you back? We started talking a little bit about the '80 campaign. We're having a hard time getting answers from Kennedy people, and to some extent from Kennedy himself, as to why he ran in 1980. I mean, you started to get to that a little bit, but could you shed some more light on that? Why did he challenge an incumbent President of his own party when we've heard reports that he had urged his brother Bobby not to challenge an incumbent President of his own party in 1968? What was it about Jimmy Carter that seemed to propel Kennedy into the race?

Broder: I thought at the time, and I guess in retrospect I would still say, that the disagreements were genuine and went pretty deeply into the Democratic Party. Those disagreements still exist. I mean, we're going to have another round of debates between the populist wing of the party and the establishment, if you will, economics, Bob Rubin school of folks. Carter was trying, in his way—I'm not a great defender or supporter of President Carter; I thought he was not a very good President—but he was trying, in his way, to change the direction of the Democratic Party and make it a party that was less a party of organized labor, of the populist view, and much more what he would regard as a modern political party.

I can recall Ham [Hamilton] Jordan and Jody Powell talking about the struggles that they saw within the Democratic Party to get them to accept a different notion of what the party ought to be. That, which he saw as a much more conservative approach to policy, I think, really went against Kennedy's strongest instincts. At the beginning I don't think it was particularly a personal challenge or a dislike for Carter in any personal way. I think it was a genuine policy disagreement. You can make the argument as to whether he was right or not, but I think, in his mind, he had reconstructed a version of his two brothers' careers that told him, This is not what the Democratic Party is supposed to be fighting for. We're supposed to be on the workers' side; we're supposed to be trying to sock it to the guys who are making too much damn money out of this thing and putting that money into things like a national healthcare program. He didn't see any of the sign of that from Carter.

Carter, I would have to say just personally, was not a warm, fuzzy person. And so I doubt that Kennedy found much personal rapport there. I don't know that, but my guess is that those two never really bonded on any personal level. He wasn't alone in having that problem with Carter. But I thought it was a serious policy debate, and when the Democrats met at that midterm convention, you could see that that party was really torn. I mean, you had people who, at that time, were fundamentally strong figures in the Democratic Party—Doug Fraser of the Auto Workers—standing up and saying, "This President is taking us away from our bearings." Kennedy obviously heard that and shared that feeling.

Lindskog: So it's really a struggle for the soul of the Democratic Party much more than it is about the Presidential race with the individual.

Broder: I think so, yes. I mean, it became, obviously, a Presidential race because ultimately, if you're challenging for the direction of your whole party, the place to make the challenge is at the Presidential level. There's no other place you can really change the fundamental direction of the party.

Knott: We've heard some reports that that campaign, the Kennedy campaign of 1980, was not particularly well run.

Broder: It was a mess.

Knott: Could you talk about this mess?

Broder: The odd thing was that it appeared to be, from the outside, that he had been preparing for a long time for that race. But when he announced and started traveling, it was as if it was all slapped together at the very last moment. And those first trips were really, in basic terms, very poorly organized. Of course the capstone of the whole sense of unpreparedness was the Roger Mudd interview, which everybody has focused on, and rightly so. I mean, the most basic, predictable question, he was not prepared to answer at that moment, as you know. I mean, it's not uncommon for Kennedy not to hit it exactly right on the first stab, and he may come back and do two or three other versions of it, but that was particularly damn costly.

Knott: Right. And then they were knocked off stride very quickly when the Iranian hostage—

Broder: Yes. That was an external event, which they had no way of predicting. Jimmy Carter, very cynically but shrewdly, used it as a way to sort of say, "Well, that's politics, but I'm way above the battle." And it worked.

Knott: Yes. Kennedy suffered some terrible defeats early on, but he stayed in it to the bitter end. There are Carter folks, to this day, who will tell you that he cost them their man's reelection in the fall against [Ronald] Reagan.

Broder: I don't believe that, but he made it extremely difficult for Carter. I thought that the last night of the Democratic Convention, Kennedy's behavior was really beyond the pale. I mean, if you're going to show up on the stage, then shake hands with the damn President and don't force him to pursue you all over Madison Square Garden to get the picture there. I mean, that was comical to the press, but it was devastating, I think, in terms of the symbolism. And I'm sure it was deliberate on Kennedy's part.

Knott: Did you know Steve Smith at all?

Broder: A little bit.

Knott: I believe he was the campaign manager.

Broder: Yes.

Knott: Some of the criticism has been directed against him for that poorly run campaign, but it strikes me that—

Broder: I think you've got to take it back to the candidate. Campaign managers can make a difference, but it's essentially the candidate who picks them and who either gives them the authority to run it or doesn't give them the authority to run it.

Lindskog: Can you discuss some of the fallout? After Ronald Reagan wins the election, the Democratic Party is in disarray. What was Senator Kennedy's political stakes? Was he viewed cynically? Was he viewed as a scapegoat for the loss, or was his power stakes, in a way, enhanced now that President Carter was no longer a major force?

Broder: My recollection is that he did not draw much or most of the blame for the defeat. It went to Carter instead. I can tell you, from my own reporting, that the voters made up their mind pretty clearly by Labor Day that they were ready for a new President, and all they needed was to get some reassuring signals from Reagan during the campaign that he was capable of being President—that he wasn't too old, that he wasn't too extreme, and so on. But they had had it with President Carter, and it was more because of inflation and the hostages than anything that Kennedy did to him. It may have contributed, on the margins, to some of the disaffection among some of the liberal Democrats, but in the end I think most of those people probably voted for Carter.

Lindskog: And there were also, of course, Democratic Senators who had lost seats—

Broder: A lot of them, yes.

Lindskog: —and House members. That would be true of them as well that there wasn't any resentment?

Broder: I don't remember hearing any particular backlash against Kennedy. There were people, who clearly were Carter people, who were upset that they had challenged in the first place. You heard that all the time, throughout the year, "Why is he doing that to us? We need everybody together." I didn't hear that much of it after the election.

Knott: Were there a lot of Senators, in the summer of '79 leading up to '80—members of the House as well—who were urging Kennedy to get in and to take on Carter?

Broder: Oh, yes. Some of whom supported him and some of whom disappeared when he ran.

Knott: Were the personal questions a problem for Kennedy in '80? His marriage was widely known, or thought, to be on the rocks at the time. Chappaquiddick was only ten or eleven years old.

Broder: Yes. I can think of a few people I could name in New Hampshire who I would have thought would have been Kennedy people, who were instead supporting Carter because they had come to distrust his basic character.

Knott: Do you buy the theory that's out there that Kennedy became, in some ways, a more effective Senator once he got this Presidency bug out of his system, that you can almost see two careers here?

Broder: Well, he has become a more effective Senator, and it came after he got his tail handed to him in the Presidential thing. I mean, I've never heard him talk about this, and I've never asked him about it, but I think it must have been a hell of a shock to him, because there was an assumption, foolish in retrospect, when he got into that race against Carter that he would clean Carter's clock. I mean, everybody thought Democrats would be so happy to have a Kennedy again, and they're so ambivalent, at best, about this guy, this accident that happened to him named Jimmy Carter, that Kennedy will just walk away with it. Well, that didn't last more than two weeks. The stumbling start plus the hostage crisis, and everything was reversed. That had to be pretty tough for him to absorb and digest. I don't know what the mental processes were that he went through.

Knott: Do you think Kennedy, and perhaps people like Douglas Fraser and others, in the late '70s, early '80s, misunderstood the extent to which the country was moving to the right?

Broder: Yes, I do think that. I mean, they were arguing for something that, in retrospect, looks to be almost passé. And they were arguing from a declining power base as well. I mean, Doug Fraser being a perfect example of that.

Knott: And that passé something was the New Deal, big government, a Great Society liberalism?

Broder: And the optimism that government programs, if you devised them and funded them, could deal with most any problem that came along. The American people had lost that belief. They may be, you know, selectively getting it back, but it certainly was on the wane at that point.

Knott: We've been told that Kennedy had a better relationship with Ronald Reagan, in some ways, than he did with Jimmy Carter.

Broder: That's probably true. I mean, they were both great Irish bullshitters. They could talk with each other and so on.

Knott: By the way, we're very grateful for the piece you did on the Tip [Thomas] O'Neill, Ronald Reagan—

Broder: Oh, that was a lovely bit of things to write about, so I'm grateful to you guys for telling me about that.

Knott: Max Friedersdorf's oral history.

Broder: Yes.

Knott: Reagan had that ability to reach across the aisle, apparently.

Broder: Absolutely, yes.

Lindskog: You mentioned that Senator Kennedy has improved as a Senator after the Presidential bug, or at least it seems to be correlated. Can you talk about some of the ways you've seen improvement? What does that look like?

Broder: Well, a couple of things come to mind: One, he's always had good staff, but I think that his own mastery of his briefs on the policy stuff has gotten steadily more impressive over the years. The second thing that strikes me is that he has an increasing influence as a role model for a lot of the people who have come into the Senate on his side since then, who didn't know him at all when he was thinking about or actually running for President. Probably half the Senate has arrived in that time, and there are many of them, the younger ones, who clearly look to him as their model. The third thing—I said two, but there's a third thing—he has become, I think, increasingly skilled at figuring out where to find Republican support for his legislative initiatives and working across the aisle to get bipartisan sponsorship for his bills.

Knott: Can you tell us a little bit more about some of those Republicans that he may have had good working relationships with?

Broder: Well, there are a number of them. I won't think of all of them, but he's obviously worked with [John] McCain on issues. I think Lindsey Graham, among the younger people, is somebody who enjoys working with Kennedy. It's not across the aisle, but I mean, when John Edwards was in the Senate, half the conversations you'd have with Edwards, Kennedy's name would come up, and it was clear that he had sort of said, "This is the mentor that I'm going to follow." And I don't think it's an accident now that Edwards has gone off on the poverty issue as his issue in the Presidential thing. I think that probably also is a Kennedy influence, directly or indirectly.

Lindskog: That seems to shock people outside of Washington. Did that surprise you when you saw this?

Broder: That he plays bipartisan? Yes. Sure, it's a surprise because the Republicans regularly use his name in fundraising letters as the symbol of everything that they're fighting against. He knows that, and as you've heard him say, I'm sure he finds it sort of amusing that he's both their target, but also, in some ways, a favorite dancing partner for a lot of them.

Knott: We've heard that he has a close relationship with Orrin Hatch, although others have said that that's a little bit overstated.

Broder: I don't know what that relationship is, really.

Knott: Hatch takes some credit for—I don't know how to put this—helping Kennedy dig himself out of the Palm Beach mess and getting his life squared away.

Broder: I think it's possible. I just don't know that relationship.

Knott: His whole personal problems—the alleged excessive drinking and the infidelity and so forth over the years—did that take its toll amongst his colleagues at all? Did you ever get the sense that there was a, "Geez, he'd be so much better if—" or did you pick any of that up?

Broder: I think, for the most part, Senators tend to be non-judgmental about those things. I'm trying to think whether I had ever heard—I think what offsets that is that his reputation in the Senate is clearly somebody who keeps his word. In their world, that is *the* measure of personal

character. When you say, "I'll do this," or, "I will fight you on that," can you take it to the bank? I think, for the most part, they think that they can with Kennedy.

Knott: During the Clarence Thomas hearings, he was criticized for basically remaining silent, and I think it had occurred in the wake of the Palm Beach stuff.

Broder: Yes.

Knott: That was probably the most public example of where he was criticized by some folks who were normally allied with him.

Broder: Yes. And the women's groups were particularly upset at that time, as I recall.

Knott: In ninety-four, he has a very tough race up in Massachusetts with Mitt Romney. We're getting mixed signals as to whether he was truly in trouble that year or not.

Broder: Oh, he was in trouble.

Knott: You believe he was?

Broder: Oh absolutely, yes. I was covering that. There was a time in September when it looked like he might actually lose that race, and what I recall so vividly was that he clearly had sent out the alarm, because I walked into his headquarters down on the waterfront there, and it was like reliving my whole life. Everybody that I had ever known in any Kennedy campaign, going back to 1960, was at a desk and on a phone there. I mean, they put out an all-hands call for everybody to show up, because he needs help, and they did.

Knott: Why was he in trouble in '94?

Broder: He was up against a really good opponent, and '94 was a year where people were ready to vote for—take a serious look at Republicans. I mean, they won everywhere around the country. I think the main thing was that Mitt Romney was a really good candidate, and I saw that again when he ran for Governor and won the race, and I expect to see it again in the Presidential.

Knott: You do? You think he'll be a formidable candidate?

Broder: Yes.

Lindskog: Have you noticed any difference in press coverage of Senator Kennedy over his time? Can you tell us a little bit about this? A lot of people like you were suggesting that '94 put him in a particularly vulnerable position because of Palm Beach and other things. Have you noticed any differences in the coverage of him over time?

Broder: That would be hard to generalize. I think, back home in Boston he gets generally very good press now. I would say the same thing is true in Washington. One thing that enters into it—I mean, it's probably a small thing in itself, but cumulatively it adds up—he has been extraordinarily caring about a lot of people who get in trouble, whether it's illness or financial problems or whatever it may be, including people in the press. He will make a lot of calls and so

on. I mean, he was particularly fond of my great friend Mary McGrory, but what he did for Mary was just, you know. And he did it totally because he loved her, not because he was looking for any benefit. That kind of kindness is really rare and is really appreciated by the people who know about it.

Knott: During the Clinton years, healthcare emerges.

Broder: Yes.

Knott: There seems to be a real opportunity here, and I know you deal with this at some length in your book, but could you tell us a little bit about Senator Kennedy's role in the Clinton healthcare?

Broder: Well, the interesting thing was that it was less of a role than you would have ever expected from him, given his history on the subject. He certainly was supportive, but whether it was because of his particular relationship with [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan or what, he never found a way to use his full influence to get it moving, and I know it frustrated him. I remember the conversations with him, particularly in the spring of '94, when it was stuck. He was getting more and more frantic to figure out how to try to get it moving, but I don't think he ever figured out quite how to weigh in as fully as he would have liked to.

Knott: Was Moynihan part of the problem?

Broder: Moynihan was part of the problem. Again, I don't know what their personal relationship was, although I don't think it was a particularly close one. Moynihan was never really a Kennedy person after John Kennedy. I don't think they were particularly close. You had the turf problem as well, that it belonged to the Finance Committee, and Moynihan thought he had his own strategy for doing a deal with [Robert] Dole in the Finance Committee, which never came to pass. My guess is that he was probably stiff arming any effort from Kennedy to move. I know that Kennedy wanted to move it to the floor without going through Finance, and talked to George Mitchell about that, and Mitchell said, "We can't do it. We have to go through the committee."

Knott: Did Kennedy have a good relationship with Hillary Clinton at this time? Was that working okay?

Broder: As far as I can tell, yes. I think so.

Knott: And Ira Magaziner as well? Did he have a good relationship with anybody?

Broder: That was different.

Knott: Do you think this is probably his biggest legislative disappointment? I'm asking you to surmise.

Broder: Yes, that and I would guess he's probably very disappointed with the changes on the Court. You have to get somebody else to explain Kennedy on the Court.

Knott: You don't think it's his devotion to civil rights that leads him to take this, perhaps—

Broder: I think, clearly civil rights has been an issue for him. Maybe it's that simple. His questioning on Judiciary of the judicial appointments always strikes me as being, "Well, Senator, what do you expect him to say? He's not your appointee. He's the appointee of the President. What do you expect from him? Make up your mind. If you don't think he can possibly tolerate it, or if you don't think he has the judicial—" I was really amazed at the Democrats with Judge [John] Roberts. I thought if you were inventing a character for a Supreme Court Justice or Chief Justice, you would invent John Roberts. It did not seem to sway any of them from that group there at all.

Knott: So it's your belief that Kennedy is a contributor to this poisoned well that we have when it comes to judicial nominations?

Broder: I think so, yes. I mean, the famous attack on Bork is what Republicans often talk about now, but I think it goes well beyond that. It's the general pattern of saying, "Unless you can pass our litmus tests, left or right, we're not going to let you go forward." The result has been that the confirmation process has gotten much more political in the narrow sense. We have campaigns now for and against judicial candidates, and not just Supreme Court. For some of them at the Circuit Court level, where nobody can ever tell you who the hell is sitting on a Circuit Court, but they'll fight like cats and dogs over them now.

Knott: Did you know Steve Breyer at all?

Broder: Oh yes.

Knott: He was very close to Kennedy.

Broder: Yes, and a model, again, of rectitude and the kind of character that you would want on the Supreme Court.

Knott: Do you think there's any chance this process can be fixed?

Broder: Well, I'm afraid it's a generational thing. I was talking with a relative newcomer on the Democratic side, who was talking about the Alito confirmation. He said, "I really deeply respect my senior colleagues," and he mentioned several of them to whom he felt particularly close. And he said, "But we start out talking about Alito and they're talking about Bork. At some point we have to say, 'That was then; now let's deal with what we're dealing with now.'" It will be that kind of generational change, where all of these fights are ancient history to these people and they don't have a dog in that fight any longer. But it's gotten really bad.

Knott: Can you characterize for us the relationship between Ted Kennedy and Bill Clinton? A good one, an important one, or perhaps not particularly close? How would you characterize that?

Broder: My sense was that there was a lot of respect and some good personal feeling. I thought that when Clinton went up to the Kennedy Library that there was—I mean, Clinton is an emotional guy. Sometimes the emotion comes almost too easily to him, but I thought the emotion that day was genuine. I thought that Kennedy was genuinely touched by it. I thought it was a good relationship. Again, Clinton was calibrating much more carefully, and in some ways

cynically, than Kennedy felt was appropriate on some issues—welfare reform being a notable example. So they had their disagreements, but I thought it was always a pretty good relationship.

Knott: We've heard that Kennedy was fairly effective in blunting a lot of the [Newton] Gingrich Contract with America, at least certain aspects of it. Is that true?

Broder: Well, the Senate was, and he was quite effective in the Senate, even as a minority Senator.

Knott: So he can play defense, in a sense, if he has to.

Broder: Yes, absolutely. I mean, he knows the Senate and he knows the rules, and he's also quite willing to stand up on his hind legs and be a pain in the ass when they're trying to move stuff through. He's not intimidated by being on the minority side.

Lindskog: Is that also a change that you've noticed, in terms of a knowledge of Parliamentary procedure and the inner workings of the Senate over time, or has he always essentially had the knack for this?

Broder: No, I think they all learn as they go along, and he's learned about all of it, as suspected, at this point. There was probably a time when Bob Byrd could have run circles around him when it came to Senate procedures and rules, but I don't think that's the case any longer.

Knott: Do you know if he played an important role at all during the impeachment, during the trial, the Senate trial?

Broder: I do not know how influential he was there.

Lindskog: Can you talk about the relationship that Senator Kennedy has to other contestants for Democratic leader? I don't mean just in the Senate, but he's obviously his own power base. Can you make general characterizations about his relationship with Byrd or Clinton or Carter over a time, how people trying to be the leader, or are a perspective leader of the Democratic Party, treat him or relate to him?

Broder: Well, I'm sure each one of them has had to figure out his or her own strategy, because he does occupy, as you say, a very large piece of ground there, and he knows how to use it. Kennedy's reputation is not that he's a guy who has elbows out, trying to shove other people out of the way, but there are areas where he and his staff represent the historical wisdom and probably the greatest single competence, certainly on the Democratic side and maybe in the whole Senate.

[BREAK]

Lindskog: I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about your experiences as a journalist covering the Senator over time, if you had any stories you'd like to talk to us about or any experiences that symbolize this time.

Broder: I don't see him with great frequency, but when I do, it's always worthwhile. As I've said a couple times, you need to be patient with Kennedy, but he's very patient with reporters, at least in my experience. He will stay with a topic or subject or situation as long as you want to stay with it. He's not somebody who gives you a sense, "Well, enough already. I've got other places to go." In his talk yesterday about Helen Dewar, he said, "She used to drive me crazy by asking the second and third and the fourth and the fifth follow-up question," but he said it with great affection, as if he knew that's how a reporter really does her job. You get the sense it's not a burden to him. He enjoyed the interchange, and he's also, obviously, very much aware of his role outside the walls of the Senate, that he does influence public opinion, and one of the ways he does that is through the press.

I've had a different relationship with him, in an entirely different context, through the Institute of Politics. I was up there many years ago as a fellow, and I've stayed involved with their programs over the years, and of course that's one of his serious causes. I saw him at an anniversary celebration just this past, I think, September we were up there together. That has provided a bond over the years that's separate from any kind of a relationship that we have as politician and reporter. I think he knows that I'm very grateful for my experience up there and very committed to helping them any way I can, and I certainly feel that he has that commitment as well. So that's been a different kind of a bond between us.

Lindskog: And his staff, relating to journalists, could you please talk about that?

Broder: Oh, they're terrific. As I said before, he's had a very good staff, both the policy people and the press people, over the years. They clearly understand that explaining what is going on and what he's trying to do is part of their job.

Knott: This occasional inarticulateness that you've referred to when you interview him, it's not a sort of [Dwight] Eisenhower device designed to keep press at bay, or is it?

Broder: I never have felt that, no. I think it's just the way his mind works, that it—

Knott: It's racing.

Broder: —doesn't instantly distill it to the essence and that he needs to work through it to get to the heart of the matter.

Knott: Have you read Adam Clymer's book about Senator Kennedy?

Broder: Yes.

Knott: Did you find it accurate?

Broder: Yes. I mean, he told me a lot of things that I didn't know. The things he was writing about that overlapped with what I had covered was absolutely on, yes.

Knott: Do you have a sense of the Senator's relationship with George W. Bush? They did work together on No Child Left Behind.

Broder: That was early on, and I think a pretty brief romance. I mean, every time I've heard Kennedy talk about No Child Left Behind in the last five years, the only thing he's talked about is, "Why won't they fund it the way they promised that they would fund it?" It will be interesting to see, because it comes up for renewal next year, how he's going to approach that. I don't think he'll try to kill the program, but I think he's going to try to make them live up to what he thought the commitments were that they were making when he signed on. Other than that, as far as I can tell, they've been at odds on almost every single thing that has come along. Obviously, on Iraq he was out early and constantly and vehemently in opposition.

Knott: Yes. I think he's even said that his vote against the Iraq war he considers to be the most important of his 44 years.

Broder: I've heard him say that, yes.

Knott: Bush initially—George W. Bush—reached out to Senator Kennedy very early on. I remember he invited him to a screening of this film *Thirteen Days* at the White House.

Broder: Yes.

Knott: There did seem to be some effort early on to build bridges there, but—

Broder: Well, it was. My own view is that Bush was seriously interested in fostering bipartisanship in the Senate and with Congress until the moment that Jim Jeffords switched parties and gave the Democrats back control.

I don't know this, but I had heard his father talk so often about—the President's father talk so often—about how George Mitchell had screwed him as President by blocking the capital-gains tax cut and other things that Mitchell did. In my own mind, I can very well imagine Senior [George H.W.] Bush saying to Junior Bush, "You watch out. That guy [Thomas] Daschle is a Mitchell guy. They're going to try to do the same thing to you that they did to me." In any case, whatever happened behind the scenes, it was very clear that from that point on, the dealings were only with the Republican side and not with—you know, if they could get a Zell Miller to come over, that would be fine on a vote, but there was no serious bipartisanship after that.

Lindskog: So you think it's before September 11?

Broder: Oh, I think, yes, before. I mean, I think it was the White House that signaled that shift before Tom DeLay did.

Lindskog: Do you know of any Senators who will refuse to work with Senator Kennedy, or who Senator Kennedy—we've been talking about bipartisanship, but any particularly hard relationships?

Broder: I'm sure there must be some. I don't know. None come to mind.

Knott: We heard that Jesse Helms was somebody that he—the feeling was fairly mutual there—that there was not a lot of love.

Broder: Well, one of the stories that he quoted yesterday, that Helen had written, was about a filibuster that Helms started and Kennedy finished. So they had plenty of occasions where they were on opposite sides. I wouldn't be surprised. I mean, Helms was unique in my experience. There are very few in politics today who are avowed segregationists—and I would say racists—and Jesse Helms was that. And I expect it probably made the hair on the back of Kennedy's neck stand up.

Knott: Right. You've been covering this town for quite some time. Is this as bad as people say, in terms of the partisan divide and the lack of civility?

Broder: I think it's the worst I've seen, yes. Particularly in the House, it's not just the partisan relations, but the personal relations have deteriorated. The way the Republicans ran the House and scheduled the House, there was almost no, even, personal interchange between the parties.

Jane Harman once told me a story that when she was—she'd been out and was coming in after an unsuccessful run for Governor. Her Finance Committee chairman had a good friend who was the Republican Congressman from the neighboring district, Chris Cox. So before Harman was coming back to Washington, he arranged a dinner so that they would know each other, and Cox said to her, "I hope you realize you're coming back to the most segregated place in the country," and she said, "What do you mean? There are 30, 40 African Americans and 20 Hispanics." He says, "I'm talking about Republicans and Democrats. They don't talk to each other."

Knott: There was a piece in *The Washington Post* not too long ago, prior to the election obviously, where there was some grumbling about Senator Kennedy within the Democratic ranks that he was too eager to cut deals with the Republicans. I don't know if you remember this particular piece. Can you add anything to that? Are there some Democrats who see him as a little bit too much of a throwback to the days when compromise was the key?

Broder: Yes, I think there are. I think, for example, his colleague Tom Harkin tends to be much more doctrinaire, if you will, than Kennedy does, less interested in finding a Republican dancing partner. They served together on what they now call the HELP [Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions] Committee, the old Education and Labor Committee, and I think they probably do differ somewhat in tactics.

I don't know how Mrs. Clinton feels. She's on that same committee there, but that's a place where the Democrats in the minority had to decide on their tactics, whether they were going to just oppose, stop what the Republicans were trying to do or look for ways to work out arrangements with them. Kennedy was always—his first option was always, "Let's see what we can work out. If we end up having to oppose it, we'll end up opposing it, but let's see what we can work out and if they're at all interested in working something out." I think that Harkin, particularly, probably said, "No, we're not going to. Why should we look for ways to make those guys look good?"

Knott: In the grand scheme of things, Ted Kennedy has been in the Senate for 44 years now. He was just reelected for another six years. As somebody who has spent a lot of time studying this

town, and in some sense particularly studying the Hill, where does he fit in the grand, historical scheme of things?

Broder: Well, his length of service, by itself, is notable. We tend to look at past Senates in terms of the Senate leaders, and that probably will continue for future historians as well. Adam's book will do a lot to cement his place, I think, in future histories, but he's going to have to share it with people who were the leaders of the Senate during this time.

I mean, I was talking the other day with Mitch McConnell, and to my surprise I said, about these new responsibilities as a leader, "Is there anybody who served as a model for you?" And I thought it would be Howard Baker or someone. He said, "Two people: Mike Mansfield and George Mitchell. They both happen to be Democrats, but I really thought the way they ran the Senate was very effective there." Well, the Senate tends to be defined by whoever was majority leader, or perhaps in a few cases—with [Robert] Taft, for example—minority leader. It's the leadership that the historians mostly look to, and I would guess that will, in some ways, limit. But there are people who are notable Senators, George Norris and [William Edgar] Borah and so on, who were not the leaders of the Senate, whose careers we still talk about.

Knott: Yes. Why would somebody who grew up in a wealthy family, who had everything life has to offer in terms of material well-being, why would he continue to subject himself to the public arena? Do you have any theories about that? He could certainly have an easier life.

Broder: You're absolutely right, but I think he loves it. We forget. I mean, Kennedy was a lawyer, and lawyers get bored. It's not unique to him. The practice of law, for whatever—I've never, obviously, been a lawyer, but having covered hundreds of them now, it's very clear that sitting in a law office and dealing with other people's problems, after a certain time, gets to be pretty damn boring. Politics, for people like that who are bright and creative and energetic and so on, offers a wonderful outlet.

For Kennedy, I mean, you watch him out with people when he's campaigning, he clearly enjoys it, and he's so good at it. He can wake up a crowd faster than anybody, and he really is good, and I think he enjoys it. Hearing him talk about his colleagues and his affection for them and his understanding of their foibles and so on—I mean, listening to Kennedy talk about John Kerry was wonderful because he wanted to be so supportive, but he knew exactly what he was dealing with with John Kerry. I think he enjoys the mix of everything.

Lindskog: How much of Senator Kennedy's political career can you sum up to the fact that he was a Kennedy, the influences of his father or his brothers on the trajectory? You talked earlier about how a part of the 1980 run was built upon an idealization or some type of understanding of what his brothers stood for. Can you talk a little bit about these influences?

Broder: Eddie McCormack was not wrong. I mean, he never could have conceivably run for the Senate or have been elected to the Senate if his name was Edward Moore. That was not an exaggeration or just a campaign line. It was very clear that he was there because he was the next Kennedy in line. So his launching was 100 percent family generated. But it's also the case that I think nothing that he now represents in the Senate is anything other than what he has achieved for himself. I mean, there's probably literally no one around in the Senate who—almost no

one—who even remembers his brothers. A few. Bob Byrd would remember them, but who else? I mean, there are a very damn few who go back to 1968.

Knott: Dan Inouye.

Broder: Yes, that's right.

Lindskog: But you see him—

Broder: He has built his own reputation.

Lindskog: And you see him as his own man.

Broder: Oh absolutely.

Lindskog: And certainly not in the shadow or trying to fulfill—

Broder: If you're doing the biography, of course you would trace the family influences, and there would be lots of them. But if you're talking about his current reputation and influence, it's what he has built for himself.

Knott: Do you know Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] well at all?

Broder: No. I know her to say hello and how are you, that's all.

Knott: Some have argued that she was a very positive influence and perhaps changed his life, to some degree.

Broder: Well, it's clearly a very good marriage. You see her at a lot of things with him, where you would not necessarily assume that the wife would be there, but she's there because she wants to be. Yes, and I think his friends feel like he's in better mental, physical shape. He still balloons up and down, and she doesn't seem to have been able to break that barrier.

Knott: Have you had occasion to cover Patrick Kennedy at all?

Broder: Very little. I don't know anything much about his difficulties.

Lindskog: Are we likely to see Senators in the Kennedy vein? You talked about the influences on Senator Edwards, but of course, Senator Edwards is no longer Senator Edwards. Are we past the point in American politics where there can be a leader of his longevity or his power base?

Broder: No. I mean, the informal influences in the Senate continue to work very powerfully. These people work with each other, particularly at the committee level, and they really do have an influence on each other.

I'll give you an example. I mean, this is a prospective one, but I was out in Minnesota talking to the young woman Amy Klobuchar, who is going to be the new Senator from Minnesota. She said one of the things that had motivated her to decide to run—she's been elected County Attorney in Hennepin County and a lawyer—she said, "I don't know whether I can get on Judiciary

Committee, but it would be wonderful to be on that committee with Senator Kennedy and some of the others there."

So I think new people coming into the Senate do look around for—and there's kind of an informal mentoring system, maybe a little more formal than just totally informal. I think there's a kind of buddy system that both parties have set up, where they try to pair off a newly elected Senator with a more-senior Senator of the same party. The orientation now of the freshmen Senators has been taken over by people who use senior Senators as the faculty on a nonpartisan basis. They run a nonpartisan orientation program now in the Senate. I don't know whether Kennedy's been doing that or not, but I know other senior Senators have been recruited for that.

Lindskog: Did you notice any mentoring of Senator Kennedy when he first arrived here, like certain people that he seemed to be trying to mentor?

Broder: I'm sure there were. I'm trying to recall.

Knott: We've heard that Mike Mansfield had some influence on him.

Broder: Well, Mike Mansfield was, of course, terribly fond of John Kennedy and gave that eloquent tribute to John Kennedy. So it's very plausible that he would have taken Ted Kennedy under his wing. And you couldn't do better than that as a mentor, boy.

Knott: He was the master?

Broder: Well, he was the greatest American I ever met. I mean, Mansfield was. I have just absolutely limitless admiration for him in terms of integrity and foresight and extraordinary modesty. I never knew George Marshall. People talked about Marshall in those terms, but Mansfield had all of those qualities.

Knott: There's nobody on the scene today who has those qualities?

Broder: Not that I know. One looks on and looks and hopes, but—

Knott: Well, thank you. That's terrific. Great. Thank you very much.

Broder: Thank you.