EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

# INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BURKE

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## Interviewer

James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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**Young:** This is April 9th, an interview in Washington with David Burke. This is the second recorded interview with Dave. Do you want to discuss the Presidential aspirations over the years?

**Burke:** Yes.

**Young:** And what you observed and what you knew of those. I think your touchstone, as you put it, was 1968, so why don't you go ahead and talk about it?

**Burke:** It's very hard for me to put it into words the feelings that I had in '68 while Bobby [Kennedy] was alive and before Bobby announced. We've talked before about how Ted was opposed to Bobby's running for the Presidency, because he had a feeling of dread. But Ted is also a good politician. He would look around the universe and come to his own conclusions as to whether Bobby would succeed. I think he felt that Bobby wouldn't succeed. I think that it was an intense time, and you're together all the time, and things are said or left unsaid during those times that have meaning.

He and I went to the states that held conventions, which was the majority of states in those years, as opposed to primaries. To win a convention, of course, you have to do well with the leaders in that state—the head of the local legislature, the House and Senate in the state, union leaders, and so on. It was quite clear that Bobby was not close to them. Other people were close to them, such as Hubert Humphrey and others, who had spent a lifetime working that side of the street. Bobby had no real interest in doing that, and he never did that.

I think it is possible—and I don't know since I didn't reside inside his brain—that Ted may have been of the mind that besides the dread he had that someone was going to hurt Bob, which was quite real, that Bobby might lose badly and that that would not be good for Ted as he went forward with his life. Why put everything at risk, including the life of my brother? I sensed that. Now, I never had a conversation with him about that, but if you threaten me with my life, I'd have to confess that I had a sense that it would have been better in his mind if Bobby just hadn't run and had instead stayed in the Senate for a while and had then figured out what else he was going to do in his life, having already accomplished some rather wonderful things. That was the first sense I had that underneath a ton of baggage—and underneath the horrors of the '60s—was a yearning on his part to someday have his shot for the Presidency of the United States of America.

I used to talk with other members of the staff. We were very proud. We would go into a state when Bobby was running for the Presidency, and people would say to us, "You're not like Bobby's people." Well, we weren't. We were a reflection of Ted Kennedy. Bobby's people were slash-and-burn and run riots through a city or a state, whereas the Teddy Kennedy people got Christmas cards for years after from people they had met on the campaign trail. They liked Teddy's people, and they liked Teddy. He was comfortable to them, and he carried a magic. He had to sense that; he had to know that. As we've described before, he is not a fool. You may think he's not paying attention, but he knows things, and he knew that. So I watched him.

I remember, on the day of Bobby's announcement, we were out at Bobby's house picking out neckties, and Ethel [Skakel Kennedy] was all nervous energy and running around and doing very competent work, I would say. Bobby was getting annoyed at all of the fuss and bother. Bobby was not a patient person in those kinds of situations. "Any tie will do," he would say. Well, that wasn't the answer for Ethel. She wanted the right tie. Finally Teddy said to me, "Come on, David. Let's go outside and take a walk," which we did. The grounds at Hickory Hill were pretty extensive, and we could walk around, so we did.

During that walk he made it clear again how much he didn't like this, and he left me with the impression of, "We have to take care of ourselves, Dave. We have to conduct ourselves in a way that's right." This may have been my hopeful thinking, because naturally, as a young person associated with him and who had come to admire and respect him on substantive matters and on the kinds of things he was attracted to in the legislative area, I wanted him to be successful one day. We didn't have to have long, drawn-out conversations about what "We have to take care of ourselves" meant.

It could have meant that we had to take care of ourselves physically. You will recall, in those days, that there was no secret service protection for people running for office. There is today only because of what happened that year. So that could have been what "take care of ourselves" meant. It also could have meant, "Remember, wherever you go, I want to make sure the Christmas cards keep coming next year. We have to watch ourselves on issues so that we don't get locked into a position on this, that, or the other thing." So my first instinct was that Bobby's running for President was not attractive to him at all. And then when the worst thing that could have happened happened, he was quite crushed by it. He might even have been hurt by the fact that he may have not been as supportive as he could have been when his brother made the choice.

After all of that happened, inexorably the convention time was coming around in Chicago in '68, and some people, especially those led by Mayor [Richard] Daley of Chicago, were not going to let this thing go. They wanted a Kennedy on the ticket, and they wanted Ted Kennedy on the ticket—not clearly thought out and not open to argument. It was just, "We're going to ram this thing." While the convention was underway, he was under an onslaught of phone calls from politicians around the country. He was buoyed by the phone calls, but I cannot say that he wasn't carried away by them. I think it became the thought of going to Chicago, standing for the nomination, getting it by acclamation.

All of this was promised by Daley and the others: motorcades into town, motorcades out of town, security all over the place. "Don't you worry. We'll take care of everything. We'll have cops in

everyone's bedroom. Nothing bad can happen here." He was afraid because all of a sudden, there it was, right in front of him. It could possibly happen. There had been no preparatory work. You know, from talking to him, that when he prepares for something, he prepares for something. He has books; he has endless documentation, papers. Because he's never, ever sure that he has it all. By that definition, he never has it all. He's just never sure of that.

But in Chicago Mayor Daley said, "If you want to have the nomination for President of the United States, you could have it tomorrow morning if you want. You come into town, and Chicago will be stood on its ear, and you will, by acclamation to the whole nation, you will—" Ted said, "But I don't know what I stand for. I don't know where I am. I don't know what my preparation is. I haven't looked at it. I haven't thought about it. I haven't talked to enough people. We should get some people and talk about it." There was no time to talk to people. This was underway. The momentum was there, and the madness was in the air. He wasn't coy about it in any way, but he was not easy to convince. It was easy to convince him to disregard the phone calls.

Suddenly the Presidency, besides being something that may have been in the back of his mind, was now staring him in the face, or the potential of running for the Presidency, and he wasn't ready and he knew it, and people close to him also knew he wasn't ready. It wasn't that he wasn't ready because he was not capable of getting ready. It was because his brother had just been murdered, and he was a hurt person. In that kind of situation, you can't ask a person to run for the Presidency of the United States and guarantee to that person that you will launch him into a campaign that was going to be madness for the next couple of months. It would have been horrible. So that was that. That's my remembrance of '68.

He was saying that he was pleased, and I certainly was pleased, when it all quieted down and stopped. When the convention came, it was a disaster, as you saw. There was nothing thoughtful going on in Chicago in those days. We were all happy when it was over, all for our different reasons. But then of course, him being him, "If we're ever going to do this again, I won't be caught by surprise. We're going to do this right and get prepared," which is what most people would say in a situation like that, but that doesn't mean that it's going to happen and that you're going to do it well, which he didn't. That's how I recall '68, and that's what I mean by the touchstone.

He might not remember, but there's a Robert Frost book, the title of which is, *Hard Not to Be King*. It's difficult not to be king when it's in you and in the situation. This is what he had. It was in him and in the situation—in him because his name was Kennedy, in the situation because he was growing in strength in the Senate. He was gaining a reputation of his own, and the tragic deaths of his brothers placed him in an historic setting. Someone writing a play for Broadway couldn't figure out a series of events that would place someone in that. Therefore, from '68 on, it was a governing factor in his mind. He wanted to someday be the President of the United States of America. There's no doubt in my mind about that. And as long as he took care of himself, he could do it rather easily. To me, strangely enough, '68 was the only spontaneous activity surrounding him and the Presidency of the United States. Everything else was supposedly "planned," and those plans were stiff and not good, and it didn't work.

**Young:** Talk about 1980. [Jimmy] Carter was now President.

**Burke:** Carter was President, and he's going to have a revolution here. Eighty was ten long years after '70, which was when I left. Over the course of the '70s, I was involved with him not often but in some serious matters, such as the Paris peace talks, and should he go to Hanoi, and that sort of thing, which I enjoyed. He had plucked me to do things like that, and I enjoyed that. But he had a whole new staff and all sorts of things that I had not been privy to and so on, and I distanced myself. Then in '77, when I went to work for ABC [American Broadcasting Company] News, that's when I made the decision that if he were to run for President, I would have absolutely nothing to do with it.

**Young:** How did you come to leave?

**Burke:** Leave him in the first place?

**Young:** Yes.

**Burke:** It was a mixture of all sorts of things. Chappaquiddick was a bad event for me, and it tore a lot of foundations away that had been holding me up. His behavior had been on and off, errant on many occasions, and I heard, "That's all right. We'll always see our way through it." After that I left. Other people in the office left after that event too. I didn't because he was running again in 1970, and I if I was going to be the last man in the office, I was going to be the last man. I didn't care.

**Young:** You were in that campaign?

**Burke:** Oh, yes. I wouldn't leave until that was over, but I knew I was going to leave. It wasn't a big surprise to a lot of people that I was going to leave. You have your whole life controlled by another person, so you live by what they do or don't do.

**Young:** Was the 1970 campaign a tough one for him or for you?

**Burke:** It should have been, but it wasn't. No, it wasn't.

**Young:** Why not?

**Burke:** That's interesting. In Massachusetts, so close to '68, Massachusetts being Massachusetts, to throw a Kennedy out of office, no matter how much you disapproved of his behavior, it would have been a large event, and not one that people would have wanted to do. Everyone, I believe, was shocked and hurt by what they considered to be his bad behavior, but that didn't mean that they were going to throw him out. They weren't guaranteeing him anything for the future, but just two years after his brother's death and seven years after another brother's death and then this situation, it is astonishing that other Democrats didn't rise up to challenge him. In the atmosphere of the times, strangely enough, that would have been a heretical act. You don't do that to Jack's brother, to Bobby's brother. Bobby wasn't that popular in Massachusetts all the time, but still, you don't do that.

So it wasn't a tough campaign. I don't think it was tough. I spent most of the campaign in Boston. The campaign was Steve Smith in New York, myself in Boston, and the Boston folks,

who were wonderful—Gerry Doherty and those kinds of people. It was clear that this was not going to be a bad campaign, and the vote was what, 64 percent or something like that?

**Young:** Yes.

**Burke:** It was an extraordinary vote. Sixty-four percent is not the kind of vote you get after a hard-fought campaign; fifty-two percent is what you get after a hard-fought campaign. When that was over, I left.

**Young:** You've left and now new people are in.

**Burke:** New people are in.

**Young:** The king is still in him and in the situation. He was not going to run against Carter for the nomination. I've always wondered why not.

**Burke:** Over that period, I got very intense about my own career and my own family, and about taking care of them and myself, so I didn't focus much on what he was doing. I thought if he wants to run for President, that's his business. Something clearly had been lost in the end of '68, '69, and '70. I wasn't heavily involved. People always ask, "Who's around?" and yes, he may have said one summer day, "Why don't you come over? We'll talk about this and talk about that," but that's not serious huddling. He had great people to rely on: Paul Kirk, Eddie Martin.

**Young:** There is a reference to a meeting at his house in McLean in about 1980. Everybody was there. You are listed as being there.

**Burke:** I was. I listened.

**Young:** Paul was there. Jean [Kennedy Smith] and Steve were there.

**Burke:** Yes, that's right. Everyone was there.

**Young:** Was his mind made up?

**Burke:** He was looking for reassurance, I believe. I was new to this thing of how can you be in the news business and also be advising someone to do something in public life that you certainly will be covering? I was unsure of how to behave, so I was silent most of the time. I thought, *I have to get out of here because I live in another world now and I can't do this. People will always say that I may have done things in journalism that were favorable to him, and I won't be able to deny that credibly if I can't believe it myself.*

**Young:** So now you've become an observer.

**Burke:** I'm just an observer on that. That's what I mean when I say I think he was looking for reassurance. "That's all right, Ted. Go." The planning for it, how to get ready for it. I'm not being critical of anybody, but when you think of the Roger Mudd question, "Why do you want to be President?" and there's no answer for it, that's not planning. Does the campaign—as [Winston] Churchill would say, "Does this pudding have a theme?"

**Young:** You had said earlier, when he's not prepared for something, he gets prepared, and that is not present here, is it?

**Burke:** No.

**Young:** In 1980, he's doing it, but he's not preparing for it.

**Burke:** That's right. It's very strange.

**Young:** One must wonder about that.

**Burke:** Yes, it's very strange.

**Young:** Was somebody pushing him into it, or was he following their lead? Was he leading them?

**Burke:** Was he pushing himself into it? If running for the Presidency of the United States was like a hearing on the death penalty, and if the witnesses were going to be the dean of the Harvard Law School and so on, he'd prepare for that because he would have to prove something, that substantively he's on par with so and so. But when it came to politics, I think he was getting the feeling that he could handle many things. "Oh that's not a tough question," and, "I can do this," and, "I can do that," maybe. But the preparation wasn't there, and I don't know why.

**Young:** He was also running for the nomination against a sitting President.

**Burke:** Yes, that's right.

**Young:** Of your own party.

**Burke:** I know. It's an astonishing thing. I don't know why someone wasn't telling him, "You're not ready." I never asked him, nor have I ever asked people who were around him at the time, because I would hear, "Who are you to ask? Where were you when we needed you?" kind of thing. I didn't want any of that.

**Young:** Well, it's a puzzle.

**Burke:** Yes, that is a puzzle. You should ask him.

**Young:** There's the falling out, the Roger Mudd question.

**Burke:** The Roger Mudd question, when I heard that, it was over. It was over if you can't do that. It's almost as though someone advised him, "They won't be bad with you. They won't ask you something like that."

**Young:** He had a falling out with Carter over health care, which is also a bit hard to evaluate.

**Burke:** Who knows the pressures that were on him? It may have been that he, I think, was rapidly getting better known to many special interest groups because of the positions that he took in the Senate, which were very strong and in many cases fearless. He became a great advocate.

Those groups, if they think you're their guy, they're on you in a million different ways. "Let me tell you what we can do for you." Who knows? It certainly wasn't a bunch of staffers who were advising him. I don't know where Steve Smith was on the issue, but people age and things change.

**Young:** So from this point on, his Presidential ambitions were—

**Burke:** Were in tatters, I think, after the Roger Mudd question. That was symbolic of anything he wanted to do after that. I don't recall that any serious attention—I may be wrong—was given to his ambitions after the '80. Every Presidential year it would come up. Of course it was worth kicking around and talking about if you're in the news business, unless I'm wrong. Am I wrong, in '84 and '88?

**Young:** It depends on who you talk to, I think. I believe he gave some instructions to some staff to assume, unless told otherwise, that he was going to run in '84. Then he decided not to in '88.

**Burke:** Well, I can understand that. You wouldn't give instructions to your staff, "I'm never going to run for President again."

**Young:** No, you wouldn't do that.

**Burke:** Because remember, a lot of smart people wanted to join your staff because they thought you were going to run for President, and they wanted to be associated with you. So you have to keep the motor running.

**Young:** So much is made, in the biographies, of the family's feelings, of the children, who have to be canvassed in this, and that is what figures large in most people's historical consciousness about what was holding him back. It's hard to figure why he would have that discussion. The king dies hard. Maybe that's it.

**Burke:** Yes, maybe that's it.

**Young:** And there's this great game of, when did it die? [*laughter*] There's speculation about that, that this is when he became a legislator, some people say.

**Burke:** That's right. I don't think there was one day. I think it was happening over time, a *long* time. You can't just become a true legislator, an historic legislator, which he is. It's hard to keep from being king, but it takes a long time for it to drain away. You still think you can be king sometime, and you see that the potential promise of being a king is beneficial to you in terms of attracting interest and staff, and people come to you with good ideas.

**Young:** You get a lot of followers.

**Burke:** That's right. It was draining away, though, and his comfort level was going up with the fact that he didn't have to be President to be famous—historically famous, I mean, not cosmetically famous. And he is that. He has made an extraordinary career for himself, and who would have believed it?

**Young:** But even after the Presidential ambition goes away, does this affect his connections, the lobbies, the interests who can do something for him, as you put it? Do they fall away too?

**Burke:** No, they don't.

**Young:** Does it make his legislative self, his legislative accomplishments more difficult or easier?

**Burke:** In the Senate, I think it made it easier, because it was, "If I'm a Senator and you're a Senator, and you're always going to run for President, and you want me to cosponsor a bill with you, I have to watch out because you're using me. But if I'm a Senator and you're a Senator, and you're going to be a Senator for 40, 50 years and I am too, we can work together all the time." It's a collegial body. It's been the transition from the guy of, "when it's in you and in the situation," to the Ted Kennedy of today.

There was a crazy little dinner party for his birthday a couple of weeks ago, a month or two ago, and a Massachusetts Congressman was there, Bill Delahunt, who is a pal of his. He's a nice fellow and a straight shooter. It was just eight or nine of us around the table having a nice night, and Delahunt stood up to make a toast to Teddy on his birthday. He said, "I want to make a toast and tell you that the best thing that ever happened to the United States of America is that you lost in 1980. That's just the best thing that ever happened to this country." And he was beaming. So it's a long way from Roger Mudd's question to Delahunt at the birthday party, but it's true: God works in mysterious ways.

**Young:** And now he's playing President-maker.

**Burke:** Yes. Barack Obama.

**Young:** Do you have anything to add to the early days, some color to show the personalities who were there and how he was dealing with them? We've heard some of these, but there have been very few people named, and there has to be more going on between him and some of the bulls, as well as with some of the younger, more liberal Senators.

**Burke:** I think you're discovering that he had interrelationships not with a steady group of people, which would give rise to a million anecdotes about so and so. He conducted himself in the Senate in such a way that he maintained his own singularity as a Kennedy who is in a seat and who may, God willing, keep it for many years. To the other members of the Senate, he was always going to be a little different, I think. He didn't hang out with the southern bloc. He was always courteous. Talk to Bobby Byrd about it and it will bring tears to your eyes. When you're a staffer for him and he's on the floor in a debate or in a committee, differing with another Senator on the panel, he is so hesitant to be discourteous that as a staffer I'd be furious with him. "Why don't you rap that guy upside the head? He's so wrong on this." That's appreciated in the Senate, because when he gets going, he can have a booming voice and he can go.

He had a way of forming very strong and good relationships with people who were not Senators but who were associated with issues—health, for example, or Vietnam, I recall. He formed very close relationships with many people on those issues. I think those people were a relief from the politics of life, but they didn't provide you with a bunch of colorful stories either. Mike

Mansfield, for example, he loved Mike Mansfield, but you had to be careful that you didn't show that too much because Mike Mansfield was an upright, straight guy, and he didn't have anyone fawning around him.

I remember campaigning with the Senator. He and I went out to Montana, not that you had to, to campaign for Mike Mansfield when he was running for reelection at one time. Who has to campaign for Mike Mansfield? He learned all the stories about Mike Mansfield: how many languages he could speak, how he had been a high school dropout, how he married as a very young man to a wonderful woman who straightened him out and made sure he went to college.

Mike was a miner. He put the dynamite in the holes in the rocks, and his working buddies used to call him "Tap her light Mike," because Mike was the one who had to tap the dynamite into the hole in the rock ever so gently. I don't know how the Senator found that out. Good staff work? I remember in one of the last speeches he gave for Mike Mansfield in Montana, he turned back on the podium and he looked back at Mike and he said, "Tap her light, Mike." I thought Mansfield would dissolve. Where did that come from? He hadn't heard it for years. That was the endearing quality. After the accident in Chappaquiddick, when Ted came back, Mansfield wouldn't let him stand alone in the Senate. He said, "I'll come right down by my desk here. Stand with me while I talk to the press."

With the old guys, especially the southern old guys, he was very courteous. He brought everything his mother ever taught him to bear, because they wouldn't have liked his father but they would have liked his mother, because she was a very elegant woman. There were other Senators in the Senate you could clown around with, but you would never do that with the older southerners. There were others he saw as people of substance, and one we mentioned was Phil Hart. We used to say, "Phil Hart's a saint."

**Young:** What was it about Hart, do you think, that made the Senator have these feelings for him?

**Burke:** Hart was soft spoken—not noisy in action, word, or deed. Hart had a lot of money. You would never know that. Apparently his wife was an heiress of some magnitude, and you'd never know that they had been so fortunate. In a conference, the bill is passed in the House, the bill is passed in the Senate, and the conference committee comes together. If Hart and Teddy were on the same conference committee or something, I'd be sitting behind Teddy in a small conference room up in the Capitol, listening to what was going on. There would be Republicans and Democrats, of course, from the House and from the Senate, and when Phil Hart would say something oh so softly that you could hardly hear it, the room would fall dead silent. His decency commanded respect. He was just, I think, the most decent man Teddy felt he ever met. And you had the Japanese fellow who said, "Everyone knows Phil Hart," because he's decent.

**Young:** Does it help to understand that the staff is going to change and has changed a lot in size and so on over time? What was it like when you left the staff? You mentioned that a number of other people also left. This was after Chappaquiddick. Was that a turning point, or did a new kind of person come in?

**Burke:** No. I can't remember who was left. There may not have been that many, but it was enough that it was on my mind, or there was talk of "I'm leaving," and there was talk about

people leaving. There were some people who felt that the Senator couldn't be effective, at least for some time to come, and they were ambitious, and some of them behaved like ordinary humans behave. But the staff, when I left, compared to when I came—and I'm not saying this about myself—staff people were transferable in the Senate.

**Young:** Yes.

**Burke:** Someone didn't belong to someone, and a few of us didn't like that. If you worked for Teddy Kennedy, you're a Kennedy guy and that's it.

**Young:** Carey [Parker] stayed.

**Burke:** Carey stayed. Carey was one of the ones I was proudest of having hired, and Jim Flug, who I was proud of having hired. Dick Drayne stayed. He was the press fellow. Paul Kirk stayed. Paul was a beacon of integrity and decency himself. So the staff was, compared to an ordinary Senator's staff, wonderful, but compared to what a Kennedy staff could be like, it wasn't fully developed yet.

**Young:** But the core was with us.

**Burke:** The core was in place, yes, that's right. Even on the committee levels. They say that's why the people who worked on the various committees are rather famous in their own right.

**Young:** Did you do some of the groundwork for health care in terms of Walter Reuther? How did this issue come to be on his agenda so early and so prominently? We know about the Committee of 100, and apparently Walter Reuther asked Kennedy to join it. Did this come from some scouting on your part about the kinds of issues that he might—

**Burke:** No.

**Young:** How did it?

**Burke:** In terms of health care, it has always been a fascination of his own making. He holds doctors in high regard. He's not a fool, but he still holds the profession in high regard. It's part of this sense of, "There's a social demand here. How can I be so lucky to call a doctor whenever I want and get the best attention in town, and Freddie down the street can be dying and you can't get a doctor for him?" It's a very big part of Ted Kennedy's life, his justifying the situation he finds himself in. Thank God. It has benefited millions of people in this country, I'm sure. In that regard he'd be doing what his mother wanted. His father would most likely want him to be on Armed Services or on the Finance Committee or something, and his mother would want him to take care of sick people. That's nice, and God, that's what he wanted very much.

He loved health care as an issue. I was involved with it and talked very early with him about neighborhood health centers and those things, to bring them to the people. One doctor I recall, who was the head of the Mass General Hospital, was blown away by Ted Kennedy because he wasn't stern and gruff. He was hail fellow well met. He was very comfortable with doctors, and he was very attentive. Each doctor would bring his or her—mostly his in those days—

perspective as to what medicine needed and what our society needed and so on. It was always fascinating to him. He was doing good work, and he knew it was good work.

**Young:** Organized medicine, so called, had killed every effort at universal health care in the 20th century up to that point.

**Burke:** Yes, that's right. It's extraordinary, isn't it?

**Young:** Yes.

**Burke:** You still meet people today—there is a group of doctors at Mass General Hospital today who will tell you that the reason why this hospital is jammed and why the emergency room is bulging and so on is because we don't have a national health care system in this country that people have attempted seriously. These are rather radical doctors we have around here. But it is strange that organized medicine has never been as excited about health care as Ted Kennedy has been.

**Young:** They've been very excited about government involvement, and it's an extraordinary history. Teddy Roosevelt made the first effort for Social Insurance, it was called, modeled on the European system but adapted for American use.

**Burke:** I didn't know that.

**Young:** Calvin Coolidge made the second, would you believe?

**Burke:** Silent Cal?

**Young:** You talked a lot about the '94 Senate campaign, and we've also talked with Ranny Cooper, so we're getting a pretty good sense of that. I would like to hear your observations on Kennedy and [William] Clinton. The reason I got into this was, after reading the Elsa Walsh piece on Kennedy and Clinton in the *New Yorker* magazine—it was mostly on Clinton—it made a great deal, not at length but in content, of Clinton helping Kennedy out in '94 and of Kennedy helping Clinton out earlier.

**Burke:** Yes.

**Young:** And setting something of a background for Kennedy's relationships with Clinton on policy as President in the Senate, because that was an interesting relationship. I've tried to get into this by asking, what do you know? Where was Clinton in this '94 campaign?

**Burke:** Where was Clinton?

**Young:** Yes, or any observations that you have about the Senator and Clinton at any point.

**Burke:** Very little, to tell you the truth. Just to put me in the story, in '94, I was still in a financial company on Wall Street. I had just left after merging it with another company, and I was going into semiretirement, except for staying on the board of directors and that sort of thing. I was up on the Cape when I heard about Teddy and his race. As in '93, '92, '91, '90, '89, I was

not involved with Teddy on a daily basis, so I didn't know what he was or wasn't doing with Clinton.

I would have been terribly surprised if Clinton hadn't been very helpful to him in '94, and indeed he was. Hillary [Clinton] was too. She came to the campaign and spoke, I remember, out west, in the Mount Holyoke area and so on. The Holyoke area was Mount Holyoke College. It became quite apparent that the numbers were bad, and it looked like Teddy was going to lose to this fellow [Mitt] Romney, who, as we all know now, is very attractive cosmetically. He's a very attractive and terribly articulate candidate, so he was an unusual challenger for Ted Kennedy. The Senator had run against people before, but they were just people, and this guy was out of central casting. I wouldn't be surprised if the Clintons took note of that and, given their ambitions for the future, were in touch with Teddy to say, "Anything I can do to help you, you let us know," because they knew they were going into a tough year.

Imagine, as we've discussed before, the surprise to the whole world when Newt Gingrich's revolution, who was the Katrina of politics in those days, blew down every tree except for one oak tree still standing, Teddy Kennedy. Who'd have believed it? I thought of that when he was making the decision this year as to who to support. It seemed to me that he could have given Hillary more credit. But he sees something in Obama. We'll all see, won't we?

**Young:** Yes.

**Burke:** It was funny, as I think back over it, my existence with him was stop and go, but it's been a very enjoyable part of my life. He is one of the more colorful figures of our time in public life, and he's had enough tragedy to destroy three people, and yet he hasn't gone down.

**Young:** What do you think is the source of his sustenance or inner strength that carries him through?

**Burke:** I don't know. I have some silly ideas about it. I think he's still proving himself to someone, and my bet is it's his mother, because he was never going to amount to much. He certainly has beaten that rap pretty well, and I want him to keep proving himself to others, to someone, because it's beneficial. The kinds of things he uses as vehicles to prove himself are quite in keeping with what I think should happen in public policy in this country. So it's been a very enjoyable part of my life, and it's been a highlight in my life, and I've been clever enough to find a way to maintain a relationship with him while not allowing him to completely control my existence. That way I can have my own life and take care of my family at the same time.

I think it's beneficial for persons in public life to have some relationships with folks who are not tied to them, but they can rely upon to never mislead them or do something for their own self-interest. So he can ask me about a million things over time, and I'll put myself at risk with him sometimes. I did that a little bit on the endorsement this time, and that's fine.

I did it one night when I may have had a glass of wine too much, and I berated him endlessly about his indecision on the war on Iraq—just berated him up and down one side of my kitchen and down the other. He had a sense that it's the best thing that ever happened to him. You can do that if you dart in and out. "It was the best vote of my life," because he was not wishy-washy on it. Someone had nailed him right down to asking, "What are you going to do? And don't give me

the double talk about it, Senator." He became rather convinced that he was going to—he likens it to another symbolic moment, Hamburger Hill. He loves the story of Hamburger Hill, which helped him on the war in Vietnam, and he felt that it made him a major spokesperson against the war in Vietnam and that it gave him a sense of ease.

**Young:** Talk about that a minute, about Hamburger Hill.

**Burke:** I was driving to work one day in my little Volkswagen, from right here in Northern Virginia, into the Senate, and hearing the news broadcast for maybe the fourth time that morning about the second or the third or the fourth assault on this Hamburger Hill. The American soldiers were driven off the hill again, and there was a casualty list as long as your arm.

**Young:** This was in the 1960s.

**Burke:** Yes, in the '60s, '67, and they were going up that hill again. And for some reason I was—it had never happened to me before—personally infuriated by it. I got to work, and I got a yellow pad of paper, and I wrote a statement about Hamburger Hill and the meaningless killing of people on both sides for a hill called Hamburger Hill—no advantage, no tactical, no nothing. I brought it over to the Senate, not to the Senate floor.

He was in a hearing. I showed it to him, and I don't think he had focused on Hamburger Hill. He looked at what I had written, and he got up and we went into the room behind the hearing room, "What's this all about, Dave?" because he could see that I was agitated. I explained it to him. He went over to the Senate floor and he read it, and it caused an uproar because he had not been known as someone who—I can't remember the language now, but I could look it up some day. I'm sure it was overdone. [*laughs*] I'm sure I wouldn't approve of it today, but it got a lot off my chest, and it got a lot off his chest apparently, and he discovered the sensation of, *Isn't it nice to get it off your chest?*

I remember we were at a dinner party somewhere years later, and Brent Scowcroft came over to our table where we were sitting—back and forth, back and forth. Then the Senator said to Brent Scowcroft, "See this guy sitting next to me? He wrote Hamburger Hill." So to Teddy, it's still on his mind. Brent Scowcroft said, "He wrote Hamburger Hill?" [*laughs*] Joe Alsop wrote a column about Hamburger Hill and about what idiocy it was. Of course Joe was a big hawk.

**Young:** Reminiscences of that come back in Baghdad—clearing a neighborhood and then going back.

**Burke:** Yes, that's right.

**Young:** Clearing a city and then going back.

**Burke:** There is nothing new, and we're going to discover that about Obama too. There is nothing new. It's not a distressing thing to say; it's a human thing to say. He's going to be, hopefully, a successful political President, as everyone else tries to be, except for the recent one. So I've had a great relationship with the Senator over the years.

**Young:** How is he on the floor of the Senate? Is he a floor performer? What are his distinguishing characteristics?

**Burke:** It has changed over time, part of it because of the passage of time and the effects on his back and so on. He used to be very patient on the Senate floor, waiting endlessly for a turn to speak and so on. Now he has to be sitting. He loves the Senate floor and the courtesies of the floor. I think he finds that if you use the courtesies of the floor successfully, it gives you time to think and to plan what you're about to do or say. You can put things off by another courtesy. I mean, if a Senator even coughs 10 feet away, you yield immediately. So he was never aggressive on the Senate floor. I didn't see it often, but he might have had a loss of temper, when he could have stomped off maybe, but I don't recall any great instances of that. He was not a pansy out there, but he was not aggressive. He liked being on the floor. As he has gotten older, he doesn't even think now when he's on the Senate floor about what to do. It's such a home to him that he can't make any mistakes on the Senate floor.

When we were amending a bill in '67, when Lyndon Johnson was riding high and you could pass anything you wanted, any amendment, we'd have an amendment and I'd meet him just off the Senate floor and then we'd go onto the floor. In those days, he'd be on the floor and I'd be sitting right behind him in case he needed a reference in the debate. Before I'd leave our office, I'd go over to the bookcase in the office and take down four or five books. I didn't know what they were—maybe the street directory of Lynn, Massachusetts. It didn't matter what the books were. I would come onto the Senate floor holding these four or five tomes, put them on the Senate desk beside the Senator so that he could lean on them while he was debating the amendment. Anyone who was frivolous enough to oppose what he was proposing, they'd say, "Oh, Jesus, he did his homework. He has all those books there, and he's going to kill me." He used to like to lean on the books. The joke in the office used to be, "What books are you bringing over today, Dave?" [*laughter*]

**Young:** You chose them by thickness, not by content.

**Burke:** I couldn't care less about the content, just so he could lean on them. Those are funny memories. He was comfortable on the floor after the first, once he made—but he would, on a serious piece of business—for example, the poll tax fights—before delivering the opening speech on that debate, I mean, he was a very nervous person—endless preparation at his home beforehand, going over the speech again and again. He was very nervous, and he took it very seriously. Other members of the Senate saw that.

There are few outbursts on the Senate floor of a personal nature. I've never heard about him speaking against another Senator or anyone against him.

**Young:** I think there was one little one with Rick Santorum.

**Burke:** Yes, Rick Santorum.

**Young:** When he was going after Massachusetts.

**Burke:** Oh, that's right.

**Young:** The Catholic liberal.

**Burke:** Oh, yes. Well, if you're going to defend Massachusetts, anything goes.

**Young:** A breach of decorum.

**Burke:** Ted Kennedy: "Well, we're on the House floor to defend Massachusetts."

**Young:** What is he best at in terms of doing things in the Senate?

**Burke:** As far as dealing with his constituents in Massachusetts, he's best at working through agency problems for various mayors and so on, and it isn't all pork barrel stuff. It's getting a ruling, getting something done, clearing up some red tape, for which people in the local communities, they love you forever if you can do that. It doesn't make national news or any kind of news, but he's very good at that, and he enjoys doing that, I think. He's good when a new bill is going to be introduced in an area that he is interested in and that he's contributed to. He loves the meetings beforehand. He loves the cloakroom and the give and take, even when it gets down to, "If we could change the language just a little bit, I'll go to that fundraiser for you down in Pennsylvania" or something. He likes that. He likes the negotiations. He likes doing it that way.

**Young:** He's pretty masterful at that.

**Burke:** Yes, he's very masterful at that. He gives of his time, and he's very generous with his time, but he usually expects in return—not in a harsh way at all—that you will be as generous with him as he's been with you. He's formed some strong relationships. They're not always lasting, but they don't end in disaster. If you talk to Warren Rudman, the former Republican Senator from New Hampshire, or even to John McCain, a Republican Senator—McCain was going to punch him on the floor one day.

**Young:** I didn't know that.

**Burke:** Yes.

**Young:** For what?

**Burke:** I don't know. You should ask him about it. I forget what it was. I wasn't there. McCain came roaring down, and the presiding officer said, "We had better call the Sergeant at Arms," because McCain had that look on his face like he was going to punch someone out. It was just a silly argument over an amendment or something, and Teddy persisted in his position apparently, and McCain was going to—but I think they're friends. He loves the Senate. It would drive me crazy, but he loves it.

**Young:** He has always liked it, hasn't he?

**Burke:** Yes.

**Young:** Didn't he take to it at the beginning?

**Burke:** Yes. I think he likes the camaraderie. He can look around the Senate body, and he knows who he likes and who he doesn't, and who he has to be nice to and who he doesn't, and so on. It's a pretty regulated life once you get on the floor, once you get in the Senate.

**Young:** What changes have you noticed, if any, over the years?

**Burke:** On policy matters, he is far more assured of his positions on things, almost to the point where you don't want to debate him about it anymore. That's understandable. He's been around some of these questions a million times, and there's nothing new about it. Physically the Senate is very comfortable for him because it doesn't put too many demands on a broken back, which hurts him. That's been a drawback in his life over the years. See, I wouldn't have expected this year, in 2008, that he would have wanted to endorse anybody. He didn't have to endorse anybody. He is a highly regarded member of the senior establishment of the Democratic Party in the United States of America. If this convention is going to get bollixed up or if it looks like it could endanger the possibility of a Democratic win for the White House because of the behavior of certain candidates and so on, it might be historically interesting to see him stand aside and be a participant in putting it back together again.

**Young:** Yes, exactly.

**Burke:** That would be a wonderful role for him, but something else was calling him out, and apparently he's enjoying it. At least I don't hear many complaints. Physically it's very demanding, and he's being reminded again that running for President is a young man's job and a young woman's job. I would have preferred to have seen him in a more elder-statesman position, because a person like that may be needed, but he didn't do it.

**Young:** Was there any precedent for him to declare?

**Burke:** No. The rule of our life was, "Never in a primary." You just never do it, because you don't please anybody. Oh, you'll please half the people, and half the people you'll tick off. Part of my shock was that he did that, and there was no need to do it. Why put himself at risk at this time?

**Young:** Has the family—has Caroline [Kennedy] done this before?

**Burke:** No. It was brand new for her, so I think there's more at play here. Her children influenced her greatly, and I think maybe some of her friends did too. Ranny is big on this, because I'm running here or there with Ranny, who doesn't think I'm pro-female enough. How come I'm the only one who's for the woman to be President? Ranny, she's wonderful, and she was so important in '94.

**Young:** One wonders how it will affect his relations with the next President.

**Burke:** His relationship with the next President is—

**Young:** Or if Hillary stays in the Senate, his standing in the party.

**Burke:** I suppose one thing you could say, or could guess at, is that his reelection in 2012—and no one knows where we're going to be tomorrow, and he doesn't know where he's going to be in 2012—gives him a certain liberty to do one last thing he wants to do. It's like one last hurrah, to be introduced, to come out on the stage, the people going crazy, especially young people, and misty eyes looking up at you as someone who is delivering a new hero to them.

I've talked to him and to Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] about—this was maybe a year ago or two years ago—setting up a plan, starting a year ago, where we encourage various significant and highly important organizations in Europe to invite him over to deliver lectures, the subtle message underneath being, "America is still the America you knew. We're coming back." Someone has to be given the process of putting our life back together again with the civilized world, and I thought that would be a good thing for him to do as he winds toward the end of his career. To be Ted Kennedy in Germany saying, "Ich bin ein Berliner" like his brother. I mean, the place would go crazy.

**Young:** Yes.

**Burke:** Vicki was insistent that I have to stop suggesting that, because he physically can't travel. Well, since he's endorsed Barack Obama, he's hardly been home. He's in every railroad cattle town; he's everywhere. He was in Kansas a couple of days ago, someone said, and he's here and he's there. You don't even see him on the news anymore, but he's still out. Maybe there's a rejuvenation going on here. I don't know the answer to that.

**Young:** It's interesting.

**Burke:** One of the beauties is, he's not calling me. [*laughs*]

**Young:** He's in no trouble.

**Burke:** But I do love him.

**Young:** Thanks very much.

**Burke:** Thank you.