



## EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD CLASBY

October 11, 2005  
Milton, Massachusetts

#### **Interviewer**

Stephen Knott

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TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD CLASBY

October 11, 2005

**Knott:** Let me tell you a little bit about the transcript of this interview that we do with you today—you'll get a copy of it in about three or four months, and you can make any changes to it at that time that you want.

**Clasby:** I saw that.

**[Break]**

**Clasby:** All of them did. The oldest son went to Harvard and he played hockey. Lettered in hockey. The next boy went to Cornell and played fullback for Cornell. The next boy, kind of interesting, was a Parade All-American in high school and he went on to Notre Dame, started for Notre Dame, and played for Gerry Faust. Dan Devine, first. His freshman year he started and he went to the Sugar Bowl against Herschel Walker, and lost the Sugar Bowl. But the interesting part of it is that my wife Mary Jo—Mary Jo Gargan—her father was in the same backfield as Knute Rockne.

**Knott:** Is that right?

**Clasby:** Oh, yes.

**Knott:** Wow. You have a pretty storied athletic past. And future.

**Clasby:** Absolutely.

**Knott:** Well again, we want this just to be a relaxed discussion of your memories, your recollections, your observations of Senator Kennedy. That's the whole point of this.

**Clasby:** Fine. If there's no particular format, we'll just go where we want to go, and see what happens.

**Knott:** Yes. Perhaps the best place to start would be if you could tell us a little bit about yourself. You were just giving us some of your background—where you came from, about your parents. That’s probably the best place to start, and then we’ll move toward Senator Kennedy.

**Clasby:** Sure. Well, I was born in Boston, but spent most of my life out in Natick, MA. And a father and mother, and had two brothers: my brother Ed [Clasby]—older—and my brother Jim [Clasby] in the middle. Both went to Boston College. Ed is in the BC football Hall of Fame; he was captain of baseball there his junior year, which is a little bit unusual. Brother Jim was very young getting out of high school—just turned 16 years old—and went into the Marines, went to the Marines twice, and went to Boston College. He did pitch for Boston College, but his high school career, because he was so young, was a little bit—not up to what he probably could have done if he was a little bit older.

Dad and Mother worked in the penal institution. My dad was in charge of industries, and my mother actually worked many jobs. They both were not educated but very smart. My mother went through the eighth grade, and could speak three languages. We had Lithuanian grandparents on my mother’s side, and Irish on my father’s side. My dad went to about the sixth grade. His father and mother died when he was very young. There were eight children, and he helped support them at a very young age, 14 years old. He was a blacksmith. Owned the New England Hobos, which was a baseball team at the time, kind of a famous baseball team. Both parents lived to be quite old: my mother at 94, and my dad at 85 or something. And he was hurt and actually died of an automobile accident, so we don’t know how old he would have been.

I grew up in Natick. Natick is a small town outside of Boston, about 25 miles or so, a great athletic school. In fact, in the last two weeks it has been my pleasure to go into the Natick High School Hall of Fame. I didn’t even know they had one! I knew they had something, but they have made it formal. Doug Flutie and I are going in. You remember Doug Flutie?

**Knott:** I sure do.

**Clasby:** We’re going in this coming November, in a little while. In high school I played a lot of sports. Not to brag, but it doesn’t go anywhere if I don’t tell you these things.

**Knott:** Go ahead, please.

**Clasby:** I was All-Scholastic in three sports, and was All-Scholastic in football two years, and had scholarships really to go almost anyplace. Boston College under Mike Holovak, who was a great player and a great coach, wanted me to go there. I said that I would go there if I didn’t go to Harvard, but I always wanted to go to Harvard. I don’t know exactly why. I had some people in the town—Mr. Ephron Catlin, who was the vice president of a bank in Boston, and a few other people—who were kind of pushing me in that direction. About two weeks before I was to report at Boston College, Harvard said, “We’d like you to go to prep school.” They sent me to a prep school in New York called Trinity-Pawling. Trinity-Pawling really changed my life, because in high school I was playing football, hockey, baseball, running indoor and outdoor track. I concentrated a little bit too much on athletics and not enough on scholastic.

Anyway, going to Trinity-Pawling was absolutely great. It was a structured existence; it was a healthy deal. We had good coaching. Athletics was a little less at the prep school level than it was at the Natick High School level. I just had a year that I could sit back and take a look at things and realize that I was at least smarter than I thought. I got into Harvard, and went there.

**Knott:** When did you enter Harvard?

**Clasby:** In '50. But Harvard, at the time, you could play freshman sports. There are no more freshman teams almost anyplace in the country. But we played all sports as freshman, and on the football field as a freshman is where I met the Senator. I didn't know anything about him; he didn't know anything about me. We were just teammates who walked over the Charles River to practice and to go to school. One of those days, walking back to class, we just started talking at the same time: "What are you taking?" and, "Where do you live?" and, "How are you?"

**Knott:** Had you heard of the name? Did you know the family name?

**Clasby:** Oh, yes, absolutely. But I really didn't associate it with anything. Actually, the President [John F. Kennedy] was a Congressman at the time. He wasn't even Senator. He was Senator in '52. So there wasn't anything that rang a bell.

Even then, I can remember Senator Ted had a very curious mind. He would walk with you and he'd ask you questions, and even if he stopped to—if someone was doing something, carpentry or something, he was always interested in finding out what made you tick a little bit. I think he was—I was a little unusual at Harvard at the time because it was a very wealthy school and I was a very poor guy. I think it was interesting to him why I was there.

We had wonderful conversations. And a little bit about him as a football player: As a freshman, he was bigger than most. He was coordinated very well, and very tough, and loved to play. He was an end and I was the tailback, which is similar to a quarterback in today's world, or in the shotgun, a quarterback. We had one interesting situation against Brown where I had hurt my finger but could still throw, and he went out and went across the middle, and I threw him a long pass, and he made a spectacular catch. Spectacular! To this day, we reenact that pass. Now he runs a little slower, and I can't throw quite as far. But it was always great. Even in years that followed, we would reenact that situation. He went on to score against Yale. He went on to play very well, and he had overtures from the Green Bay Packers.

**Knott:** Oh, really?

**Clasby:** Yes, he did. A lot of people just don't realize that. But he was a very good player.

**Knott:** Was he a tight end? What we would consider to be a tight end?

**Clasby:** I would call him a tight end, yes, today. He loved to play.

**Knott:** And you said very tough. Able to take the physical punishment?

**Clasby:** Well, he never shirked back from any drill. He was always in the middle of it. He liked the contact, and he was just a very good guy who—you wanted him on your team, that’s for darned sure. Freshman year, after walking over the bridge and getting to know each other a little bit better—“What course are you taking?” etc.—he said, “Would you like to go down to Hyannis Port to my beach house?” And I said, “Sure, I’d love to do that.” I loved to swim. The situation when we arrived—the Ambassador [Joseph Kennedy] was there, Mrs. [Rose Fitzgerald] Kennedy was there. Actually, Jack was there. Really, it was a—

**Knott:** Any sense of what time this would have been?

**Clasby:** Yes. It would be in the fall of 1950. For some reason, I guess I can’t really explain it, but I was put completely at ease. It was just something that—you just fit in. We sailed. We played touch football. It was just a very relaxing situation. The only thing that was a little bit hard was they played a lot of games, and mind games. Of course, they would ask various questions, and everybody was supposed to answer them. Well, I would throw in an athletic question, which I was more versed in than they were. You know, “Who wrote *The Ancient Mariner*?” and stuff, which was always very good.

Anyway, so that was always a lot of fun.

**Knott:** A lot of energy in the air, and just sort of—

**Clasby:** Energy all over the place. Everything was done quickly. There was sailing and then, “We’re going to have dinner in 22 minutes.”

I also noticed that there was a relationship between Ted and Jack at the time that I thought was interesting. One is that Jack was kind of sickly. He was a little frail. He could play football, but just, you know—you’d get the ball a little bit and just throw it, and everybody watched out that they didn’t bump into him too much. There was a relationship between the two of them that was—I almost could see that the older brother just felt that this other guy had everything. He was bigger and stronger, and every one of them was good-looking. He would really call Ted aside and talk to him, and no one ever knew what they were talking about but there was a lot of laughing going on. You could just see the beam in Jack’s eyes about this guy.

I also realized that the father was *the* guy, and that everybody didn’t move very much until the father moved. In fact, in getting ready for dinner, they had a sunroom, and everybody would go in there for a cocktail, and no one moved for the dinner table until the father took a girl’s hand and walked in.

**Knott:** Was the father personable to you? Friendly towards you?

**Clasby:** Absolutely. And so it was something that was very different from my experience, something that they made very easy for me. I didn’t feel like I wanted to get out of there. I enjoyed it very much. Later on, an interesting thing happened down there. I had one suit coat, a sport coat, and I went down there, and someone from the Salvation Army came around or

something, and Mrs. Kennedy went in to where I was staying and gave them my suit coat! I should have sent them the bill!

So that's the early part of the situation. And I met Mary Jo—my wife Mary Jo—at a football game, where she came with Jack.

**Knott:** Was the purpose to fix you guys up, do you know?

**Clasby:** No! It was to see Teddy play. But for some reason, that stuck in my mind, and I think stuck in her mind a little bit, because we later married and had seven children.

**Knott:** How long after that did you first go out on a date?

**Clasby:** It was interesting, because Mary Jo—a little bit of her background: Her father was a great war hero. He was in some great battles in World War I. Again, he played in the same backfield as Knute Rockne. Her mother was the sister of Rose. Rose and Agnes [Fitzgerald Gargan] were sisters, the Fitzgeralds. Mary Jo's mother died when she was three. And you're going to meet Ann Gargan King this morning.

Mary Jo then went to live in the summer with Ted's family, and in the winter up in Lowell. But she went to private schools, which Aunt Rose took care of and made sure she was taken care of very well. Mary Jo's father died, I think, when she was 12 or 13 years old. So the relationship with Ted was very close, and this was very obvious. Ted also had—as I think about it, he now is the patriarch of the family, and watches out for them. But he also did it back then with someone like Mary Jo.

Mary Jo was in Manhattanville College on the way to New York, and Ted and I would go to New York on a few occasions, and we would actually have dates—I don't know if we should put this in there, but maybe we should—with young ladies from *Seventeen*, a magazine. It was very nice, and we actually went to the Stork Club a couple of times. Ted would say, "My dad wanted me to do this." He knew that I didn't have any money to be in the Stork Club.

Anyway, that was very nice. We would stop and see Mary Jo on the way. I finally woke up to the situation. *Why am I going to New York? I like this girl! Not as far as New York, and much better.* She invited me to go down to a dance. As I remember, it was unlike today's dances. At eleven o'clock, she had to be back in the dorm. I got her back 11 minutes late, and they campused her for six weeks. Shows you how things have changed.

**Knott:** Boy, things have changed.

**Clasby:** How things have changed! Then, because of distance, Mary Jo and I went steady when I was a junior in college. She would come up with a very good friend of mine, Bill Frate, who had a girlfriend in Darien, Connecticut. Mary Jo would come up, and there was a lovely lady in Cambridge who had a lovely apartment building, her name was Mrs. Harrington, and Mary Jo would stay with her when she came up. It was a very nice situation.

**Knott:** You came from a very different world than Senator Kennedy.

**Clasby:** Different world, absolutely.

**Knott:** Was he curious about that world that you came from? The working class—

**Clasby:** He was really curious about almost anything about other people, and especially if they were a little bit, for want of a better word, successful. He wanted to know what made you tick. If there was someone actually cutting a tree down, he would talk to that person and find out about them and why they were doing this.

He just had a very curious mind, and I think finding I was different from most of the people he grew up with—He wasn't so different from the people I grew up with except that he was rich. But I always thought a rich kid—if I was in junior high school, I thought I should fight him. I don't know why. He was just a spoiled rich kid. That wasn't the case here. There was just a relationship that was very easy and very nice really from the beginning.

**Knott:** Was it difficult for you at Harvard in any other—Outside of Senator Kennedy, was there a kind of class atmosphere there that you found—Did people ever hold that against you if they knew about your background?

**Clasby:** I would say this: I would say that I had enough going for me athletically that that wasn't a particular problem. I was captain of the Harvard freshman team, and went on to captain the football team. So it was something that, you know, I didn't have to walk around with a hole in my shoe and be embarrassed. But I think it was a little bit different.

**Knott:** Yes, I'm sure. I asked you before we put the recorder on, how you found the time to do any of your studies.

**Clasby:** That was a very difficult problem.

**Knott:** You worked 24 hours a day, it sounds like.

**Clasby:** Well, I played athletics, worked on training table, lived at what they called the Varsity Club, and I worked at the Charlestown Boys Club three nights a week unless I was playing hockey. It was a full schedule, and I was lucky enough to be healthy—although after football season, usually hurt. I dislocated a shoulder and broke my nose many times because you didn't wear a facemask at that time. And they could grab you by the facemask. You could wear one, but they could grab you by it and actually hurt your neck or break your neck if you didn't watch it.

So it was very difficult, and I think if I had one slight regret about school, I would have liked to have gone to class a little bit more and done a little bit more of the things that I shortcutted a little bit. I had a sponsor going to college called Mr. [Forrester] Clark. He was from Hamilton. He was the head of H.C. Wainwright. He was one of the leading guys to start the Patriots—a very wealthy man. I said to him, "Mr. Clark, if I would drop a sport, I could get more Bs here." He said, "Dick, a lot of people can get Bs here. You get 'H's.'" Those were athletic 'H's. I said,

“OK, I guess I’ll take your advice.” So I did. I guess maybe a few more Bs and a few less ‘H’s. I guess I’d take the ‘H’s.

**Knott:** Could you tell us a little bit about how your friendship evolved with Senator Kennedy? Did you remain friends after college came to an end?

**Clasby:** Absolutely. I think mainly what helped that a great deal was Mary Jo, because I worked on the Cape as a counselor, and Mary Jo came over. I went over to the big house more and more. Actually, it was just a progression of things. He went into the service, I graduated, and we never saw each other.

To this day, we understand each other. One, I did work on campaigns for Jack. In fact, I ran Oakland County in Detroit with a guy by the name of Marty Doctoroff. I worked for Bobby [Kennedy]. I worked for Ted, too. So there was always an association there. We really didn’t have to see each other every week to know each other was there, and especially with the death of my daughter. He was the godfather, and he didn’t have to say anything, I didn’t have to say anything—he, with Jack and with Bobby.

Of course, he broke his back in an airplane deal flying to a convention—kind of interesting. At that time, we were in Detroit. Mary Jo and I had four children at the time. I was at a swimming meet with my oldest son. There was a big fence around the place, and my other son, Bobby [Clasby], the boy who went on to Notre Dame, was on a teeter-totter—I don’t know what you call it—you know, one guy on one side, whatever that’s called.

**Knott:** Seesaw.

**Clasby:** Oh, *seesaw*. Anyway, I saw the other guy jump off, and my son came down and hit his nose. I could see it was serious, so I jumped over the fence and I went over. Believe it or not, I had set my nose many times myself. I had a pencil with me, and I set his nose. I realized that if I didn’t, it was going to be too swollen to set it.

A day later, Mary Jo was taking the train to Boston to go to Hyannis Port, which we did in the summer then for a month or six weeks. My son was taken to the same hospital where Ted was on a system called a “Stryker,” I think it was called, where he was this way, and he was turned this way, and he had that for over a year. The doctor did some work to straighten Bobby’s nose. And he said, “Who did this? He did a very good job on it!” It was actually me.

So there has been a relationship basically in college, close, and Mary Jo bringing it very close.

**Knott:** Sure. So you said you spent a lot of summers at Hyannis Port?

**Clasby:** Yes. And there was a wonderful fellow who’s still there, called Rodger Currie. R—O—D—G—E—R, he spells his name, Currie. He was a great war hero in World War II. Most decorated Marine flyer in World War II. Went in the service at 18 years old. He was one of the first people with a high school degree who could get into the flight school. He had a home in the compound—a very close friend of the Kennedys, and Senator Kennedy in particular. I would go



down and spend a lot of the summer, and race with Dr. Currie. We raced Wianno Seniors in a wonderful boat. We raced against the Senator a lot of the time, and I raced *with* the Senator sometimes.

**Knott:** Is he a very competitive person?

**Clasby:** Unbelievable.

**Knott:** Does he not like to lose?

**Clasby:** Did not like to lose. He was a good loser, though. “Good loser” is kind of a wrong word; he was a sportsman, and if he did lose after doing everything he could possibly do to win, he certainly shook your hand. He was and is still one of the best sailors on the Cape. I think that with all that he has done, the place that he’s most comfortable is out on his boat, which is a beautiful, beautiful boat. What is it? *Mya?*

**Martin:** Yes. You’re right.

**Clasby:** He is just completely at ease out there, and it’s a godsend.

**Knott:** That just comes from years—from being a child, learning to sail at a very young age, and just feeling very comfortable?

**Clasby:** And loving the sea. Absolutely loving the sea. Well, that’s where it is. The house down there, as you know, is right on the water. Hyannis Port is a sleepy little village that you can be at the yacht club, and people will drive by and say, “Where’s the Hyannis Port Yacht Club?” because it’s just a little shack there. They expect to see something like down in Newport. It’s just a wonderful place. I don’t know how many years we went down, but 15 or 17, maybe even more. So our children grew up in that area.

After college, I went into the service and went to Alaska at an Air Force base and was the Special Service Officer. Special Service Officer is in charge of athletics, so that was a nice thing. Played hockey. Had a general up there called General [John F.] Ruggles who loved hockey and would come to the practices. We actually won 31 straight games, never lost. He was delighted.

Just before we went to Alaska—Fairbanks, Alaska, way up—we had our first son, but he couldn’t travel until he was six weeks old, so Mary Jo stayed in Fort Lewis, Washington, before she came to Alaska. Her sister Ann, who, again, you will find a very interesting person—The sisters were very close because of the home situation, and with their brother Joe [Gargan], also. Her sister came out and stayed with Mary Jo before and after the baby.

Her sister went into the nunnery. Do you know this at all?

**Knott:** I didn’t know this.

**Clasby:** OK. Went into the nunnery, came out of the nunnery because of a little bit of an illness. Then, when Mr. Kennedy had his stroke—I think it was in Palm Beach at a golf course—she then was with him for over six or seven years. If you saw the Ambassador in a wheelchair, behind him would be Mary Jo’s sister, who was Ann Gargan at the time. She later married an executive from the airlines from England. Now her name is Ann Gargan King. A very interesting person. This took place while Jack was President. Jack would call and speak to Ann maybe twice a day sometimes to find out about the father, so it was a very close and interesting situation. But I’m sure you’ll enjoy talking with her.

I’m sorry that Mary Jo can’t be here, but she’s out with a couple of grandchildren and my son out in California, which was arranged quite a while ago.

**Knott:** Sure. Well, I wish we could have played with the dates. Unfortunately, we had—

**Clasby:** Yes, yes. You can only do what you can do. But I think talking to them would be good.

**Knott:** Sure.

**Clasby:** And so hopefully, that will be able to—

**Knott:** We’ll make it happen someday. This is a six-year project, so we’ve got a ways to go.

**Clasby:** You’ve got a little time to straighten it out. It’s going to take you guys six years to do this?

**Knott:** That’s the deal.

**Clasby:** It must be slow!

**Knott:** Well, we’ve got—you should see the list of names of people we have to interview. I mean, it’s long.

**Martin:** And growing every day, I think.

**Knott:** Yes, it is. At least 55 members of the Senate—I mean, it’s endless.

**Clasby:** To get a little bit into the mind of Ted: While in college, in the spring—again, I lived at the Varsity Club—he would come up, and there was a place where you could play pool and have a sandwich. We were out back. There was a football, so we were playing catch. Even in playing catch, he used to, if it was handy, put on a helmet just because you had to get used to it.

We were playing catch, and there was a lady by the name of Mrs. [Anne] Healy, who was the housemother, although only four people lived in the Varsity Club. The Varsity Club coordinated sports at Harvard and still does. She was like a housemother. Her little son was there, and her little son was—I don’t know exactly the age at the time, but six or seven. Ted and I were playing catch, and then we said to the little boy—and he instigated that—“You go over there, and you go

over here,” and he had this little kid playing for the Chicago Bears almost. Well, when we were about ready to leave, I gave the boy the football. We could get another one. And Ted gave the boy the helmet.

That boy went on to Holy Cross. He went on to medical school, I think at Harvard. He was up for the Surgeon General of the United States, OK? He didn’t get it. Ted was on the committee, but he didn’t have a vote. The lady got it, and I don’t remember her name. But anyway, it was kind of an interesting situation, how lives are affected by things.

When one of my partners, before I owned the company—Davenport, Peters, which is the oldest wholesaler of lumber in the United States, founded in 1811—my partner at the time, a fellow by the name of Dave Mittel hurt his nose. He went into the Children’s Hospital, where he was on the Board, and a doctor was fixing his nose. The doctor said, “What business are you in?” He said, “I’m in the lumber business.” The doctor said, “The only person I know in the lumber business is Dick Clasby.” Dave Mittel said, “He’s my partner.” And that doctor was the boy. Can you imagine that?

So what I did was I arranged for a luncheon with Dr. [Gerald] Healy, the Senator, and myself. And all of us remembered doing this. Dr. Healy said it was one of the things that gave him inspiration. And his mother—they didn’t take out loans until he got to medical school, and his mother worked—I don’t know what the father situation was. But anyway, she paid for everything. He didn’t have a scholarship.

So, you know, there’s a guy who did it. But isn’t that something? You’re looking at many years ago, just giving a little boy a helmet and a football, how that affected his life. Seeing him later on, where he’s going to be one of two or three people for the Surgeon General of the United States, the most famous doctor in the world, and we’re having lunch. That’s the way things happen here.

**Knott:** You told us that you went to Alaska in the military after college. Could you give us a little sense of how your career progressed after that?

**Clasby:** Sure. Again, out of the service in two years, I was a lieutenant. I came back and went into the lumber business.

**Knott:** You came back to Massachusetts?

**Clasby:** Massachusetts. One of the great things in going to Harvard at the time—and it still is quite good, especially if you were a poor guy—there were a lot of job opportunities. Even when I came back, I had ten or twelve very good opportunities, Gillette and—you name it.

But I sat down with a man in the lumber business, a Mr. Olson, who lived right beside Braeburn. Fireplaces. Told me about the lumber business, etc. And I said, “I like the sound of this.” They took me in as a full partner. I said, “The only requirement that I would ask for is that you train me very well.” And they said, “OK.” They sent me to the West Coast for four months, and I visited the lumber mills from British Columbia all the way down to San Francisco and actually

worked in some of them, picking up the lumber, etc. I came back, and then they sent me to Michigan to open up a branch for them. That was when we worked for Jack in Oakland County. We were out there for about six or seven years. But again, we were coming back to Hyannis Port for most of the summer. I was supporting American Airlines. I wanted to raise my children in New England, so we left there and came back here.

Actually, I didn't go into the lumber business right away. I went into the lighting business, believe it or not, for a few years, and then Dave Mittel—he crosses my life a lot—had worked for McCoy, where I first went to work—

**Knott:** McCoy Lumber?

**Clasby:** McCoy Lumber.

**Knott:** My mother used to work for them.

**Clasby:** Who did?

**Knott:** My mother.

**Clasby:** You're kidding.

**Knott:** She was a secretary at McCoy in the late '40s. In the '40s.

**Clasby:** Isn't that something? OK.

**Knott:** Boy, I'm surprised to hear it.

**Clasby:** Well, then you know the company.

**Knott:** Yes, yes.

**Clasby:** See it crossing? Anyway, I came back here and went back into the lumber business. So I've been in the lumber business most of my life. When Dave Mittel and Herb Pratt retired, I became president and merged Davenport, Peters—which again, is the oldest wholesaler of lumber in the United States—with McCoy. Now we are a fully-owned subsidiary of L.R. McCoy, but a separate company, of which I am president. So I guess the career has been, in a few words, in the lumber business.

The lumber business is just a wonderful business. It is unique in that word of mouth is very strong. You deal in large figures. If I sold a truckload today of oak flooring, it would be \$50,000. I would say to the mill, "It's an order." And the mill would say to me, "It's an order." And it's an order. You never break that. It's a very honorable business, unlike many in other areas of business.

You're dealing with the owners of lumber mills, and Mary Jo and I visit many mills. We stay usually with the man who owns the mill. The man who owns the mill—usually, it's not a very big town. A Southern town, mostly, like McMinnville, Tennessee, where the owner owns the mill, he owns the radio station, he owns the bank—he owns everything. We go, and we stay basically with the owner of the mill, play in golf tournaments. So when someone says, “Are you working?”—I am still working, but I have to qualify that a little. It has worked out very well.

**Knott:** Environmental regulations haven't made the business tougher?

**Clasby:** Well, they are certainly making it better.

**Knott:** Better?

**Clasby:** We are growing more fiber—we call it “fiber,” wood—than we're cutting. That means we're cutting down a tree and we're planting six. There's all kinds of restrictions on how you log and what you do. So it is a business that is being perpetuated very well.

There's a lot more done now overseas—Brazil, for instance. Brazil is a fascinating country. The Amazon River is 2,300 miles long. It empties more fresh water into the ocean than the next eight largest rivers in the world. There's not a bridge over it or a dam on it. You're looking at something that is unbelievable. And we're cutting down the rainforest. You could make a strong point that the wealthy nations of the world should pay Brazil not to cut the timber, because what they're doing in order to give some of the people something to eat is that they're cutting down—they're clear-cutting. They're getting money for the logs, and the people are benefiting in this situation. But now we have the rains coming—torrential rains. Without the forests, they're washing away, after one or two years of farming. Now, literally, you could turn it into a desert. It's a very big area, but every day we are losing about 20 or 30 football fields that are gone.

**Knott:** Every day?

**Clasby:** Every day. If we keep doing that, it's not going to be good. Now, why do we need the rainforest? Most people realize the oxygen situation, that trees take on and emit oxygen, and we take in oxygen and get rid of carbon dioxide. If that doesn't happen, then we've got a terrible situation.

Again, it's nice to be in a business that has ramifications like that. And in the United States, they do it very well. The emissions into the air have been curtailed a great deal, and the cutting of the raw material has been taken care of very well. Other countries should do it; probably will do it; are trying to do it, but circumstances are against them doing that. China is the same thing. A lot of flooring, a lot of plywood is coming in from China.

The lumber industry is a fascinating industry in many ways because it is so fragmented. If you're in the steel industry—I don't know how many steel companies there are, but let's say ten. If you're in the aluminum business, let's say five. If you're in the lumber business, the largest company in the lumber business is Weyerhaeuser. They make up 2 percent of the lumber

business. Every town in the South of any size, and in the Midwest and West, there's a lumberyard in that town.

So the lumber business is, again, very fragmented, and you have to be in it a long time to realize the value of certain species, certain locations, etc. If you buy steel, you buy it grade 1,2,3,4. If you buy it from Japan, it's the same. Germany, it's the same, and in the United States it's the same. In the lumber business, that's not true. You can get trees—cherry trees from certain areas that are much different than cherry trees—or oak trees—from other areas. It's a fascinating business, fascinating. I've loved it.

**Knott:** It sounds like it.

**Clasby:** That's why I still do it.

**Knott:** Are you active in any associations? Is there a professional association, or...?

**Clasby:** I do a lot of work for what they call the Mass. Hospital School. It's in Canton. It is a state school, federally funded, state funded, that is for young people who have muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy. We've got five or six there who were shot and were paralyzed. It's something that I like doing. I get a lot of satisfaction in doing it. It also, I think, makes a better person if you do some work there.

For instance—and Mary Jo gets involved also—we go over to a Christmas pageant and the Christmas pageant is there, and there are youngsters on the stage who can only move their head. They have a pointer on a little rig on their head, and they hit the computer and play “Jingle Bells.” Now, you look at this, and the strongest guy in the place is crying. I mean, here are people—and the place is upbeat. If you meet someone in the hall corridor, they say, “Hi.” You even see a boy and a girl holding hands in this situation.

There was one guy who was shot, and he was from some place north of Boston. I don't know the name of the town. He would take transportation into town. He loved basketball, and he would then take a subway out. They would pick him up at the subway and bring him over to the Mass. Hospital School, which is in Canton, and he would play basketball. They literally played against the Celtics, who were in wheelchairs, too. They did it for quite a few years.

Well, the interesting part of this guy is that his mother would take him every day. The interesting part about his mother is that she was totally blind. Here is a guy and his mother—him steering, her pushing. She's totally blind and he can't walk, and they're going that distance four times a week to practice and play basketball. You see that, and then you have a little feel for various things.

This last year, I was very, very fortunate and proud to be chosen to get the Arthur Pappas Award. Arthur Pappas was a football player at Harvard.

**Knott:** Was he the team—go ahead. Sorry.

**Clasby:** And he's the team physician for the Red Sox.

**Knott:** That's what I thought, yes.

**Clasby:** A very good friend of mine, and very good friend of Ted's. Well anyway, there's an award that's named after him because he, a great surgeon, had donated a lot of his time to the Mass. Hospital School. For the last few years, they have honored someone, and this last time they honored me. They have a big party: 400 people at a Boston hotel. It was also in conjunction with some work that we did putting together \$1.5 million to build a new riding academy at the school. I didn't know we were going to talk about this.

**Knott:** No, we want to know about you, too.

**Clasby:** The riding academy is something that I liked because we had horses. I was always a little afraid of horses, but my wife was a great rider. We lived in Milton here, and we did have horses, and all of our children, especially our girls, rode. But I could never understand something that was 2,000 pounds, leading it on a string.

**Knott:** I understand that.

**Clasby:** It just didn't make sense to me. Anyway, my daughter, as I mentioned to you, was killed while riding a horse, where the horse was spooked, and she was killed.

We had an interest in riding; we had an interest in helping people. So we got greatly involved in this Dr. Pappas situation, although I've been out there for 15 years. The riding academy was a wonderful situation. It's amazing. We just dedicated it. The Governor [Willard "Mitt" Romney] came, and the Governor's wife [Ann Romney] came. She made a marvelous speech. It's incredible to see youngsters who can't get out of a chair—they're in a wheelchair for 15 hours a day, but under the proper supervision, with the proper saddle, you put them on a horse and for some reason a smile comes on their face and there's a feeling of freedom that they cannot get in any other way. It has blossomed into something that I'm very proud of. It's just doing wonderful work, just wonderful work.

**Knott:** Could I ask you, when Senator Kennedy first ran for the Senate in 1962, were you still out in Michigan, or were you back in Massachusetts?

**Clasby:** We were still out in Michigan.

**Knott:** So you were not involved in his first run for the Senate?

**Clasby:** No.

**Knott:** When did you come back to Massachusetts?

**Clasby:** Came back to Massachusetts in about 1965.

**Knott:** I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit, perhaps, about any sort of campaign experience, either with Senator Kennedy or with the other brothers as well.

**Clasby:** Well, with Jack, it was in '62. Mary Jo was in the campaign heavily. Actually lived near the headquarters in Boston—I guess that was '52.

**Knott:** '52, yes.

**Clasby:** OK. Then in '60, after the service, I'm out in Michigan, one of the co-chairmen of Oakland County. Now, Oakland County is the second-largest county in Michigan—Wayne County, Detroit, etc. Oakland County is a Republican stronghold, so it was quite a challenge to do what you had to do there. It was also good because, we didn't win Oakland County, but we didn't lose it as badly as it had been lost before. Basically, Michigan was one of the ones where they were waiting all night to see if [Richard] Nixon came in. It was one of the key states to—

**Knott:** For Kennedy?

**Clasby:** For Kennedy. Again, very close. So that was a lot of fun, something that I think everybody should get involved in. It's amazing what you will do. I mean, if it rains, you go out and put up signs. You don't care. You get so involved in a situation that it is an experience that I think everybody should at least do.

**Knott:** It must have been incredibly exciting.

**Clasby:** Yes.

**Knott:** Were you able to go to the inauguration, by any chance?

**Clasby:** Yes. It was kind of a funny story about the inauguration. Mary Jo wanted to get a pretty dress, and so we went, and she went with another lady who helped us in the campaign also. I remember it was a beautiful blue dress. Mary Jo tried it on and liked it, but then decided against it and decided on something else. It was a very expensive dress, at least in my way of looking at it, and the other woman bought it.

So we go to the party, and it's raining and snowy. I don't know if you remember it at the time, but it was—you couldn't get around. We're at one of the dances, dancing, and the lady who bought this very expensive blue dress was also dancing, and she actually had on her galoshes still!

**Knott:** That must have looked great.

**Clasby:** I'm glad we didn't pay that money for that dress, when it was kind of wet and terrible. And we did advance work for Bobby.

**Knott:** You did?



**Clasby:** Yes.

**Knott:** In '68?

**Clasby:** Sixty-eight.

**Knott:** Where were you when you were doing this?

**Clasby:** We were in Milton, MA. I got to know Bobby quite well. Bobby and I—how would you put it? I think we respected each other, but we clashed. I think it was mainly because of his competitive spirit. Bobby didn't have the physique that Ted had. He was smaller. He had something to prove. The touch football game became the Super Bowl. There might have been a little pushing and shoving that—

**Knott:** Was that awkward for you? Uncomfortable at all?

**Clasby:** No. But it was something that I just said, you know, "Why am I taking this?" I guess there was always a little feeling there that he wanted to compete with me in an area where shouldn't have been any competition.

As an advance man for him in Sacramento—I left there, Los Angeles, the morning that he was shot. Or the day before; I forget which. But I would advance for him, and he would always send for me. We'd have chocolate cake and a glass of milk in the evening. I said to him, "Bobby, why do you want to see me?" And he said, "Because you will tell me the truth." And I would, if I felt that he wasn't doing well, or didn't do this and that and the other thing, because I felt that's what I should do. I had nothing to gain.

**Knott:** Were there instances where you did do that? Can you recall? Where you did say something to him that this wasn't working?

**Clasby:** Absolutely.

**Knott:** Can you recall any of those instances for us?

**Clasby:** Well, what I would do is that I would know a person who was doing a lot of work that wasn't getting any recognition. There were some people who didn't do the work who were the first guy to claim credit for the situation. I directed a lot of that.

I would tell him if he was doing well, or if he wasn't doing well, if the police were cooperating as much as they should, just exactly what points might have been good or bad in an area that he was in. We then had a very close relationship. So I'm very happy I did that, for that reason.

**Knott:** You took leave from your own work to do this?

**Clasby:** Yes.

**Knott:** And you were in Sacramento the night when he was—

**Clasby:** What I did was, I would go into an area about four or five days before the candidate came. You'd look at the situation, and you would try to do things that enhanced the situation. For instance, if you had a hall that held 2,000 people and you had 1,500 people, that was a good crowd, but not a great crowd. But if you had a hall that held 1,000 and you had 2,000 or 1,500, the same number going to the same place, then it was a different ballgame.

Also, in motorcades from the airport to where you were speaking or to what was going on, they wanted to put it in the *easiest* route. That wasn't always the best image. You basically wanted traffic to be held up a little bit so the whole atmosphere would take on a different situation. That's what I would do.

**Knott:** So did you do a lot of negotiating with police chiefs and fire chiefs and all this stuff about arrangements in terms of—

**Clasby:** Absolutely.

**Knott:** So you have to be kind of a diplomat, I would imagine.

**Clasby:** Absolutely. Oh, yes. If you demanded something from a good police chief, you wouldn't get very far. But, suggestions: "Why don't we go over there?" And bands, and where you could play and where you couldn't. It was a lot of fun for me, and educational.

The big thing it did is that it had an understanding between Bobby and myself that was there that I am very grateful for that might have been—at least appeared to be—different than if I didn't do this. It was one of the good things that came out of the situation.

**Knott:** He was a draw, I would imagine. It wasn't tough to get crowds to come to a place?

**Clasby:** Not at all. I can remember we would rent cars, and usually it would be a Lincoln, and usually it would be a convertible. I had the dealer donate a couple of the cars. And I can remember, when he stopped, if there were people around, he'd stop and he'd get up—and there was even a famous picture of him standing on the hood of the car. He's standing on the hood of this car! This \$20,000 car at the time—and he's standing on the car! The dealer was very nice about it. A lot of funny things happened like that.

**Knott:** Do you recall any instances where you might have been working with Edward Kennedy on this campaign, on the '68 campaign? Did your paths ever overlap during the '68 campaign?

**Clasby:** I don't think very much. There was a lot of movement around, but passing in the night.

**Knott:** Did you see much of him after Bobby's death?

**Clasby:** We came back and then there was a train, and the train went to Washington. I can remember the train was absolutely full, and as we went—it was almost like [Abraham] Lincoln.

As we went through various places, there were huge crowds, and the train would slow down. It was a great tribute. That was a great loss. Another great loss.

**Knott:** Of course. Were you at St. Patrick's Cathedral when Senator Kennedy gave his eulogy for Robert Kennedy?

**Clasby:** Yes, Mary Jo and I and our oldest son Michael were there.

**Knott:** When did you come back to Massachusetts and sort of plant your roots? Or get in touch with your roots?

**Clasby:** I would say 1965.

**Knott:** Have you been involved in Senator Kennedy's campaigns in Massachusetts since that time, or do you tend to stay out of that?

**Clasby:** I would say that we—Mary Jo would be involved. We would do what we could. But he really doesn't need a great deal of help in Massachusetts.

**Knott:** No, that's right.

**Clasby:** They'll never stay up nights, anyway, trying to get voters to the polls.

**Knott:** In '94 against Romney, there was a bit of a scare, I remember.

**Clasby:** Yes. I think just a bit of a scare.

**Knott:** Yes. That was my impression: that it wasn't actually that serious, but the media thought it was.

**Clasby:** There was a man who actually ran for something, and I forget what it was, and his name was Kennedy, and he had no credentials to what he was running for.

**Knott:** I think it was State Treasurer.

**Clasby:** Whatever. And he won! OK? That shows you the situation along those lines.

I can remember going down—and I don't know what year this would be, but it would be after we came back to Massachusetts from Michigan. I went down to Washington, stayed with the Senator for four or five days, and I was absolutely amazed at how hard he worked. He would leave his home in the morning with the driver, and he had a light in the back of the car. He would be working on the way to the Senate. And he never left there until—again, it was in the winter at the time, so dark would be 6:00 or 6:30. And he would do the same thing.

I have never seen anybody who worked as hard and would look into a situation like he did. I always looked at this and I said, "You know, I'm amazed at this. If it were me, or the average

person, and I had a lot of money; if I had this, that, and the other thing, I don't know if I would be taking a lot of the punishment that you receive in representing situations that might not be very popular. And getting hit from lefts and rights." He didn't have to be there.

**Knott:** Well, what do you think compels him to do that?

**Clasby:** It's very complicated. I think he has a love of country; I think that he has a curiosity, which we pointed out; I think that the training that he had, the dinner table with the father. Even while I was still in college going down there, the discussion was about politics. It was marvelous to see. I just felt very privileged to be there. So, this was ingrained. It was, "Someone who has a lot should do a lot." I think he took that seriously.

He loves people. He likes the person who can't help himself. It sounds like political talk, but it is absolutely true. His friends are very close. For instance, even today, we, with probably six or seven of our friends, every year—and have done it for 15 years or whatever—before either the Dartmouth football game or the Yale game we go into a restaurant in the North End of Boston the night before, and we have a wonderful meal. We tell some of the same stories.

**Knott:** You reenact that Brown pass?

**Clasby:** We do! It's something that—you just can't laugh any more, because you've laughed out. Then we go and tailgate at whatever the game is the next day. It is just something that he arranges. He will call my office and say, "How does this date sound?"

You look at this and you say, "Why does he do this?" The only reason I can think of is that he loves the camaraderie. He'd just like to be part of the team, and he just likes his friends. It's a quality that I keep saying, "Why does he do that?" And the only answer that I can give is that he has a love of his country. He's lost three brothers tragically, and has a sense of duty, and is a real champion for people who need someone to champion them.

You know, a lot of people will throw stones at what he said about the situation in Iraq. But I think his philosophy is that we have so much to do here—

**Knott:** Here in the United States?

**Clasby:** —in the United States that we should enhance these situations and be a beacon for the world and have them want to be like us, instead of getting involved in a situation that adds fuel to interests that are not in the best interest of the United States. We're in a situation over there that is probably not in our best interest right now, and should have been handled in probably a different way. Now, he stood up and said that, and most people would look at it, especially if they're looking at it from the other side of the aisle, and say, "He shouldn't do that. He should support the situation. He should...." But someone has to say things and do things that add balance to the situation.

Even in the Supreme Court situation here, where he came off a little bit strong with the situation—well, someone has to do that. Here is a guy—I don't understand why they take the

Chief Justice and they take him from some place. Why don't they take one of the Justices and make him—I don't understand that. But this is a pretty powerful guy who's going in there and he has to stand up to scrutiny. And if you're the people doing the scrutiny—it sounds like politics, but I would bet that he spent many hours in research.

In fact, I was asked by the Duxbury Yacht Club to see if Ted would come up—it was in the end of October on a field day that they have for three days—and bring up *Mya*, the boat, because it was built at Duxbury. Was the biggest boat ever built in Duxbury. The Senator bought it from a person who saw it launched, and he truly loves it. So I did speak to him about it and he said, "I would love to do it. Not this year, but sign me up for next year, and I will." He sent a nice letter, because he was so wrapped in the Supreme Court situation. So there was a thing that he would have liked to have done—sailed the boat in, done a lot of nice situations. And he really put his work before something he wanted to do.

The other thing is that right now his back is hurting him very badly and to do what he does is quite courageous. I mean, he just has trouble right now moving like he would like to move. Hopefully it's a temporary situation that will straighten out. I can only answer the question that way. I'm amazed that he does what he does. I mean, it just—you know? "Gunga Din, You're a better man than I."

**Knott:** He has experienced—and you've alluded to this—a number of tragedies in his life: the loss of three brothers, and his sisters, and his own son battling cancer, and so forth. Where do you think he finds the strength to deal with those subjects?

**Clasby:** I think it comes from his mother. I think that he has faith. He and I did an interesting thing in college. In the Catholic Church, if you go to seven First Fridays, it's kind of an unwritten law that you're going to really be blessed. We did it in college. I said, "Well, that's a pretty good deal. Now, no matter what happens, we're all set! Oh, we're all set now!" We did get up and go to the seven o'clock Mass. I should remember—was it seven successive Fridays, or seven First Fridays? Seven First Fridays would take seven months. So maybe it was seven Fridays. But anyway, we did that. So I think that he does have a faith that is passed on by his mother, who—you would learn by just watching. That's part of it.

**Knott:** Does he ever get down, or is he constantly buoyant?

**Clasby:** There's an old Irish saying that if you lose someone close to you, you have a stone in your shoe for the rest of your life. But you do reach a point where you can put it between your toes. With my daughter, that's what my wife—when she's doing something right now, Mary Jo, tears will come to her eyes, but only for a minute. It's the same with Ted. If he's talking about something in a quiet situation, that might happen. But it's very little.

**Knott:** It's passing.

**Clasby:** We know each other so well that we don't express a feeling to each other. We don't have to. I know he knows, and that's all we know.

**Knott:** If you don't mind me asking, when did your daughter pass away?

**Clasby:** Nineteen ninety-seven.

**Knott:** And Senator Kennedy was her godfather?

**Clasby:** Godfather, and Joan [Bennett Kennedy] was the godmother, yes.

**Knott:** And he was very much a part of—

**Clasby:** Absolutely. Cards, remembrances, etc. I don't know how many people he would be the godfather for, but probably a lot. He took it very seriously, and it was very nice of him to do it. It did work out very well.

**Knott:** You knew all of the brothers to some extent. You knew Jack, you knew Bobby, and of course, you know Senator Kennedy very well. Can you give us some comparison between the brothers in terms of characteristics or differences among the three men?

**Clasby:** Well, there are a lot of things that are the same. But there are a lot of things that are different. Teddy was really the beacon, because Bobby was small. He was trying to play contact sports. He was compensating for his size and strength with courage and guts. And Jack was someone who physically just was hurt. I mean, coming back from the war and having the problems that he had, he just couldn't do it. So I think that, again, they looked at Ted as kind of the guy who's got it all, and he did.

**Knott:** We've been told by others that they thought he was perhaps the best natural politician in the family. What do you think about that?

**Clasby:** I think the best natural politician, but I think he became the best politician. They all had—Jack had a twinkle in his eyes and could answer a question in such a way, and Bobby was a no-nonsense, look-you-right-in-the-eye type guy. Bobby was different from Jack; the approach was different from Jack. You loved Jack; you liked and respected Bobby. But...I lost something that I was going to bring out. No, I lost it. It was in the comparison of the situation.

**Knott:** You had said that Senator Kennedy became—

**Clasby:** Yes. But he worked at it. I can remember one time at the Varsity Club he was going to make a donation in the family's name for a charity. I think it was maybe the Boys Clubs. So he came over and he said, "I'm going to make this presentation. How does this sound?" I don't know why he really came over; maybe he had an hour to kill or whatever it was. I said, "Get up on the ping-pong table and let's hear it." I never thought he would, you know? He gets up on the ping-pong table, and he makes the speech. And I said, "That was pretty good, but what about this?" He got down. Now he's going to make these corrections. He gets back on the ping-pong table. OK?

There is a genuine love of what he's doing. There's a genuine like of people. But he also works at it. And the grandfather—Mary Jo's grandfather and Ted's grandfather are the same grandfather. Mary Jo has great memories of Fitz [John F. Fitzgerald].

**Knott:** Honey Fitz?

**Clasby:** Honey Fitz. And Ted will get up and sing. They have a party every year down at the Cape at the end of the year where people come in and play the piano and people sing. And he is there, singing.

**Knott:** Do you do this?

**Clasby:** I watch it.

**Knott:** You don't have the voice, huh?

**Clasby:** I don't have the voice. But it's a fun thing to go to. He truly likes to entertain. He's very comfortable around a situation. He has the ability in a crowd to know who is trying to see him, trying to maneuver to get close to him. Probably for some reason they want to talk to him about something. He has the ability in a crowd to know that and to handle it.

I would say the most natural politician, although Jack was a marvelous politician. Bobby was very forthright and no-nonsense, and you respected him for those reasons. But as far as tact or tactful, Bobby wasn't. But you liked him because he wasn't.

**Knott:** We've had some people tell us that you're probably Senator Kennedy's closest friend. You go back a long ways. What do you guys talk about when you're together? Is it a lot of sports talk, or is it memories?

**Clasby:** A lot of sports talk. A lot of memories.

**Knott:** You said he's a curious person. Is he curious about what your business life has been like? Has he ever asked you about the lumber business, about what you do?

**Clasby:** Absolutely. And he's as interested in what the children are doing. Again, he just loves Mary Jo, and that is really the glue that has held all of this together. She just loves Ted. You just can't say anything against him. Not that she'll jump up and—but she just won't engage in that situation. I would say that Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford], his sister, and who Mary Jo had a great respect for—Pat was very helpful to Mary Jo.

But Ted has had a great influence on her life. In fact, when I asked her to marry me, her Aunt Rose—which would sort of dampen many people's spirit but it didn't mine—asked her to go on a trip around the world for six months. Now, you can take that two ways. But anyway, Mary Jo asked the Senator if I was a good guy to marry, and he said I was. That carried me a long way.

**Knott:** We've had other folks tell us that when the Senator married Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] in 1992, that that had a tremendous impact on his life, that Vicki's been an incredible force in his life. I was wondering if you might talk a little bit about her and her impact on his life. Perhaps you don't agree with that assessment?

**Clasby:** I agree with it completely. It has been a godsend. Actually, to be married into the family, like Joan, was very difficult because the Kennedys are very close and their name means a lot in the closeness. Even Jackie [Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis] had some problems with that. Now, when you become the First Lady and you can invite people to the White House, and the summer White House becomes Newport instead of other areas, you realize that Jackie was certainly making overtures to do some of the things she wanted to do instead of completely in the way Mother Kennedy wanted to do it.

Someone like Joan would find it very difficult to be put in that position. Vicki is strong. She's smart, she's capable, she's an asset. She has her own feelings. And people learn from experience. Probably the Senator learned things that—I don't know what they are, but everybody learns from experience. I think that she's just wonderful for the situation, and couldn't be a better partner for the Senator right now. He's a very good father to her children.

**Knott:** We've heard this.

**Clasby:** They obviously think a great deal of him, and love him. But it is something that she, being strong, being very capable, is certainly a great person in the situation, and it has worked out very well. She would have to be that way in order for it to be as successful as it is.

**Knott:** Did you know Joan well?

**Clasby:** Yes.

**Knott:** She found the political side of things difficult, perhaps, as well? I mean, was campaigning something that—

**Clasby:** I think she was shy. I think that her background—father and mother—was a little difficult. And again, you're put in a position with a powerful, powerful family that you're always under the magnifying glass. You're expected to do things that aren't always easy for you to do—campaigning, etc. If it was someone like Vicki, it would be no problem at all. For someone like Joan, it was—Joan was absolutely a beautiful girl.

**Knott:** Did you attend their wedding?

**Clasby:** Yes. But it was a situation that was hard for her.

**Knott:** Do you know his children well?

**Clasby:** Well, we know them fairly well, yes. But again, our relationship now is that we see each other in the summer; we see each other in the fall; we go to various functions that they have. I



understand him; he understands me. If he said to me, or if I said to him, “I’ll meet you under the Cape Cod Bridge at ten o’clock, ten years from tomorrow,” I think he’d be there. I know I would be there. So we understand each other, and we don’t have to see each other all the time. We just know, and like, and love each other.

**Knott:** What would you say to those people that are out there today, and maybe somebody reading this transcript fifty to a hundred years from now? Senator Kennedy in some ways is a controversial figure, at least for people on the Right, in the Conservative side of American politics, and they may have a kind of caricatured image of him. What would you say to those people who don’t know him as well as you do?

**Clasby:** Well, I think that’s why it’s very important to do what you’re doing, because history could write it any way that they wanted to write it. You have rebels, and you have people—almost always, great people in our country have been controversial. When they had duels, I mean, that’s pretty serious! So you have a situation that doing what you’re doing to see the human side of this, to see the Dr. Healy—to see that situation is very important.

I heard someplace that in order to understand what someone says, you have to understand when he said it, to whom he said it, and under what circumstances. You could take some of Washington’s speeches or Lincoln’s speeches and you could put them into a situation today and just underline that speech, and you would have a situation that projected the wrong image of Washington. That’s why what you’re doing is putting it into the proper time, who he’s saying it to, and under what circumstances.

I think this is a great idea, and very necessary to do. I do know this: I do know that he is very hard working. He is certainly trying to do a lot of good for the people in this country, the people who need someone to do something good for them, and it’s truly genuine, and it’s not political. It’s not to get rich. He’s already rich. Again, that is fascinating to me: why someone who has all the means and comforts would subject himself to people who are going to yell after having two or three bourbons.

**Knott:** I should have asked you this question earlier: Were you involved at all in 1980 when he ran for President against Jimmy Carter, when he ran for the Democratic nomination?

**Clasby:** I was, but it was short-lived.

**Knott:** You didn’t do any advance work? You didn’t do any of that?

**Clasby:** Didn’t do very much. It was also a time, and I don’t know exactly why, but he wasn’t comfortable with it. It was one of the first times I’ve ever seen him not comfortable.

**Knott:** Is that right?

**Clasby:** Yes. He loved to answer questions, to put humor into answering any questions. But for some reason, in that campaign, this ability and this projection that he certainly had didn’t come across as well. Maybe it was—

**Knott:** Do you think his heart wasn't in it? I'm asking you to engage in a little conjecture, but....

**Clasby:** I would say that his heart probably was not in it. And there were circumstances, there were issues that he owned up to, brought forth, that in some cases were thrown out of perspective. There are others that are very sad. I think under those circumstances, the true Ted Kennedy didn't come forth.

**Knott:** Do you care to elaborate on what you're referring to when you say "circumstances?"

**Clasby:** I would say that that's probably for others to do, OK? I do know some of the situations; I don't know all of them. I would say that we'll leave that for other people to go into.

**Knott:** Do you have any other recollections? I want to make sure that I haven't missed something, or some story, or some observation on Senator Kennedy that you want to tell us, that you want to tell the historical record and speak to people 50 years from now who might be reading this.

**Clasby:** I made a few notes on what you had.

**Knott:** That would be great.

**Clasby:** Well, a couple of things, and just at random here. When we were out of school a year or so, he said, "I'll bet you \$10 that within the next five years, I will beat you in a 100-yard dash." And I said, "Ted, you're on. And I am a little insulted that you would want to make that bet."

So we go skiing, and I had really never skied. I skied with the things that—you probably don't remember—where you just slide your foot into the—

**Knott:** Basically, I do remember those.

**Clasby:** I go up, and we're up at Mount Washington, up at Waterville Valley, I guess. We go up the tow, and then we get off the tow, and then we go up higher, up to a thing called "Nosedive." I'm there, and I had never skied before! We get off, and we're up in the clouds. He goes down and stops at a place. I go down, and I go, and I'm going, and I go off this—where you're supposed to go here, I go off and I'm over the trees! I fall down and I hurt my finger, and I break my ski boot.

Then we go down, and the only way we can get down—The snow is so deep, I actually had to get on his back and he would go down, to stay on the trail. You couldn't walk down from there. It took forever. So we get down, and he has on nice, light ski boots, and he actually changes into boots that were more like slippers that you put on when you get through skiing. Now I'm there; I'm exhausted; I hurt my finger; I've got these boots where one is broken. And we're going back to the ski lodge.

And he said, “Now’s the time.” I said, “For what?” He said, “For the 100-yard dash.” I said, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” I can’t even walk. He said, “That’s it. Is it the bet or is it not the bet?” So I said, “OK.” I line up. I tried to run as best I can, and he beats me in the 100-yard dash. I had to give him \$10. Most embarrassing moment of my life. But you see how if he was going to do something, he was going to pick where he was going to do it. And he did it. I’ve been embarrassed for 40-something years.

I guess maybe you have hit most of the—I thought that the Healy story was a very good story.

**Knott:** That’s the doctor?

**Clasby:** Yes.

**Knott:** I noticed it says in this Harvard piece that you actually wrote a column for the *Boston Herald* on sports?

**Clasby:** I did when I got out of school. It was called “Clasby’s Corner.” Before I went into the service. I wrote an article on Wednesday and a feature on Sunday. I’d go to the game and analyze the game and write it.

I also wrote an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* for which I got \$2,000. Out of college, that was a lot of money. It was a feature article, and it was, I think, in October of ’54. I can remember the cover: It was people raking leaves, by [Norman] Rockwell. The title was, “I’ll Take Harvard Football,” and it wanted to know why I didn’t go to Notre Dame or why I didn’t want to go to one of the big schools. At the time, football was ugly in recruiting, and I just didn’t want to be any part of that.

**Knott:** What do you mean by “ugly”?

**Clasby:** Well, they were giving money. There were people at Georgetown, University of Detroit, Fordham—I could name ten others that dropped football because they didn’t want to be part of this situation. Harvard was thinking of it, and the article there does mention that. There was a lot of concern about Harvard dropping football, which I didn’t want them to do. In our class, the fullback was John Culver. John Culver’s the Senator from Iowa. He went over to England to study afterward. John is one of the people who go to the party at the North End.

**Knott:** So you keep in touch with him?

**Clasby:** Oh, yes. Absolutely. His son is running for Governor out there, and we have supported him.

**Knott:** We interviewed him a few months ago.

**Clasby:** Culver is extremely bright. A great fullback. He’s in the Football Hall of Fame, as I am. Of course, he’s in Washington in a law office now. He was Senator in an area the Democratic Senator hadn’t won in a hundred years. Very interesting.

**Knott:** Well, you've had an incredible life. You must look back—And you've got plenty left, but you—

**Clasby:** I hope I have some left. I really appreciate what you said, and I appreciate the fact—I use the word “privilege.” It has been my privilege to be associated with Ted, and to have a firsthand look at the situation. I mean, there were parties—I could bring pictures here of Mary Jo with Frank Sinatra, which—we were at the party. At that party—I wasn't going to bring this up—he was with Juliet Prowse, the dancer. I'm teaching her how to do the polka! I mean, you've got to be kidding me.

But anyway, it has been a fun ride. I appreciate that they respect what I have done. I have done it in an area that is—I went out to Detroit and rented a house, slept on the floor, had a milkman deliver milk on the windowsill, and I was selling lumber. I did that because I really wanted to get away from Boston, because as I was interviewing for jobs, people wanted to talk about the Yale game, or they wanted to talk about this, or they wanted to talk about that. At the time, I wanted to get the work. And so I welcomed the chance to learn a business and then go to Michigan. Then after I did what I did there, which was successful, I wanted to come back. But I think I would have had a lot of trouble around here with my background, the sport background, and what I wanted to do.

**Knott:** That makes sense.

**Clasby:** It did to me. It's worked out.

**Knott:** It's worked out quite well.

**Clasby:** So I guess I was right. Well, I guess you found out all you can about me.

**Knott:** Great. Well, thank you so much.

**Clasby:** Some things I won't tell you, but.... No, there isn't any.

**Knott:** Thank you so much.

**Clasby:** Ann Gargan King—you want to talk to her.

**Knott:** Yes. That would be great.

**Clasby:** Gee, when someone said it would take a few hours, I said, “I don't know what the hell we could do for three hours!”

**Knott:** Well, we always build in a little extra time just in case.

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