Young: This is an interview with Carey Parker, on October 13th, in the Russell Senate Office Building. This is the third interview and we’ve covered a lot of ground, though not entirely chronologically. There are still some features of the 1970s, up to [Ronald] Reagan’s election, that we need to cover.

Parker: As I mentioned before, the Senator’s return to the Senate after the accident at Chappaquiddick in 1969 was immensely facilitated by Mike Mansfield. A lot of Senators shared the view that it had been a terrible tragedy, but it didn’t mean that Senator Kennedy couldn’t continue to be a colleague whom they admired, wanted to work with, and respected.

Senator Kennedy had established himself by the late ’60s as a different kind of Kennedy from President [John F.] Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. Most Senators felt, particularly the ones who had been around in the ’50s, that when JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] and Robert Kennedy were Senators, both of them were marking time until they could run for President. With Edward Kennedy they didn’t feel that way. Partly, I think, by necessity, the Senator felt that Robert Kennedy would have the option to run for President, and he certainly was supportive of that in 1968.

The two tragedies—that is, the loss of both brothers—obviously affected Senator Kennedy profoundly. There was some concern at the time that he might himself be another victim. I remember that he would occasionally have conversations about that. He decided rather quickly that he would not let it interfere with his being an effective Senator and potentially a Presidential candidate. He said, “I’ll let fate take care of that. I’m not going to adjust my schedule or trim my sails.” He would go forward as effectively as he could and hope that the protections that were being instituted for him after JFK’s assassination—and even more so on the campaign trail after Robert Kennedy’s assassination—would make it realistic for him if he ever wanted to run.

Young: Had [Richard] Nixon given him Secret Service protection?

Parker: Whenever we asked for it, they were willing to provide it. For example, I know that for campaign appearances before large crowds, if they had advance notice that the Senator would be there, whether in ’72 or ’76, they would quietly make available whatever protection he asked for. There was no question about that.

More to the point was the Senator’s feeling about his son Teddy [Edward Kennedy Jr.], who was, I think, 12 or 13 when he lost his leg to cancer. That was in 1973. That pretty much ruled
out a run in 1976. In 1972 it was still too close to the 1968 campaign. He wasn’t ready to run for President.

**Young:** [George] McGovern had asked him to be—

**Parker:** To be his Vice President, yes. He liked the campaign trail. There’s no question. He loved being out there campaigning for George McGovern. A lot of us felt one of these days he’d want to do it for himself, but there was a feeling that it wasn’t then. The question was, would it ever come?

I think it began to emerge as a realistic possibility partly because of the family situation. Teddy was doing remarkably well, and he’d had excellent medical care. People thought it wouldn’t be possible for him to recover, and yet here he is, 30 years later, with no signs whatsoever, having a very active and constructive life. I remember him coming back from a skiing vacation with Senator Kennedy, and the Senator was proudly showing everybody the photograph of Teddy skiing on one ski, showing that he was back. So there was no problem in the family in terms of the Senator running for President. Seventy-six was not realistic because there were still too many issues to clear up, but after ’76, the way was open. It didn’t seem likely that he would challenge [Jimmy] Carter.

**Young:** I had wondered whether ’76 was ever in the picture for him, that is, as early as ’72.

**Parker:** I don’t think he thought of it as likely. There was immense pressure on him to consider it. There was constant talk in the press.

**Young:** About him running against [Gerald] Ford?

**Parker:** Yes, and about some of the other candidates. After Watergate, the thought was that ’76 would be a solid Democratic year. The feeling was that it might be his best opportunity, but he didn’t feel ready to take that on.

**Young:** That was also the year when he had to campaign for reelection himself.

**Parker:** That’s true, though that wasn’t a significant factor. Realistically, I think he could have run for President. The reelection wasn’t the major factor that was troubling him. His son Teddy had recovered from his cancer, but there were still concerns. I think he felt that it would be difficult to be away and to spend that much time on the campaign trail. Once Carter won the election in 1976, I don’t think he saw 1980 as a possibility. He thought, *It looks like ’84 for me if I’m going to do it at all.* That attitude obviously changed over the course of the next three years when he became comfortable with the idea. But from at least January of 1977 through about June of ’79, he wasn’t sure that he wanted to do it.

The thing that I think persuaded him as much as anything to run in 1980 was his inability to work effectively with Carter. There are many explanations for that. The Senator was very frustrated by Carter’s reluctance to support a new initiative on national health care and national health insurance, health care for all, which had become the Senator’s basic domestic issue. He was interested in a lot of things, but first among equals was his proposal for national health insurance, which he first offered in 1969 and which had foundered during the Nixon years. After
the ’76 election, he thought that with a Democratic President, the light should be green. All the signals should be go. “Let’s get together and do it.”

But President Carter was very reluctant to take that on. He was more conservative than Senator Kennedy realized. The Senator had been encouraged by some of the things that Carter had said during the campaign. Carter clearly wanted to be on good terms with Senator Kennedy, but at the same time, there was a bit of distance. Carter was an outsider coming in, and they were both trying to understand each other.

Once Carter became President, he decided that there were other health issues that he wanted to spend more time on. This, to my way of thinking anyway, was the primary factor in the rupture that began to develop. Carter put a great deal of effort into some lesser health initiatives, and he got those off the ground reasonably early in 1977, particularly the [Joseph] Hill-[Harold] Burton Act extension. Federal aid to hospitals for construction was up for renewal, and he put a major effort into that.

Kennedy felt that Joe Califano was his pipeline to Carter. He was the Secretary of HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] during the Carter administration. Califano basically decided that they couldn’t go forward on national health insurance because of the budget situation. It would be too expensive. Also, Carter, philosophically, didn’t want to be associated with a comprehensive, national health program. Politically, he was well aware that it would have subjected him to intense attacks by Republicans.

The [Lyndon] Johnson administration was well aware that Medicare would be a difficult fight, and it succeeded in 1965 only because Johnson’s landslide victory over [Barry] Goldwater in the 1964 Presidential election gave the Senate a huge Democratic majority. It therefore could pass Medicare. But the AMA [American Medical Association] and many other organizations had been well primed during the ’60s to come out strongly against any national health program. Carter fell in line with that, and he wasn’t willing to challenge the status quo. That unfortunately strained the rest of the Senator’s relationship with Carter.

Young: Can you talk about how Carter announced it in his campaign? He was for it, but his wasn’t a ringing commitment. I don’t think it figured large in his promises.

Parker: But I think that Kennedy felt that he was saying the right thing.

Young: But how did it become clear? Was it all at once?

Parker: No.

Young: Had he been trying to push Carter after the inauguration?

Parker: Yes, through Califano largely, not directly with Carter, at least initially. It became pretty clear that they were delaying. “We’ll try. We’ll do our best,” they said. They were basically trying to keep the Senator happy. They were working with him on their other health priorities, and the Senator was more than happy to do that. but with respect to national health insurance, he said, “We can do this as well.” I think that Carter and even Califano felt that enacting national health care was unrealistic, given the political landscape, the budget landscape, and the uphill
road they would have to climb to get it. Carter said, “I’m not going to do this for Senator Kennedy.” I think that began to grate on the Senator.

**Young:** Was Stu Eizenstat involved?

**Parker:** Yes, he was involved to some extent, but he was basically a Carter person, whereas I think the Senator thought that Califano was more of a Democratic, liberal person who also got along well with Carter. When we found that we couldn’t work even with Califano, we didn’t expect to be able to work with Eizenstat, although on economic issues and things like that, relations were cordial. We respected Eizenstat, but it was clear that he was not going to carry the ball on national health insurance to President Carter, whereas we had hoped that Mr. Califano might. It became, I think, politically unfeasible and perhaps intellectually unsatisfactory for Carter to wrap his arms around that proposal.

At the same time, the political landscape was changing on other issues, and there was a lot of concern about President Carter’s relatively moderate course on a wide variety of issues. He had a good energy program, which was his pièce de résistance. But on many lesser-known, though important, liberal issues to Senator Kennedy, he simply was not on the same path as Senator Kennedy. There were disagreements over issues that we never fought out.

Kennedy was continually pressing and hoping that we could bring Carter along, and we relied quite a bit on Califano to do as much as he could. Gradually, however, the Senator came to understand that even with Califano, it probably wasn’t going to happen. Other liberal issues were also being shortchanged in the Carter years, which led to an almost party-wide feeling that Carter was not the President we had hoped he would be.

With the ’78 elections coming up, 1980 concerns grew as well. There was more talk of “What are we going to do in 1980?” and rumors began to circulate that Kennedy wouldn’t rule out a challenge to Carter in 1980. After the ’78 elections, in December, the Senator gave what was called the “Sail Against the Wind” speech at the Democratic midterm convention in Memphis, Tennessee. He basically sounded a call to arms to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. “The tides may be against us, but sometimes you have to sail against the wind.”

**Young:** “Now is not the time to furrow the sail.”

**Parker:** Furrow the sail, yes.

**Young:** I thought I recognized some Parker rhetoric in there.

**Parker:** That produced a great deal of support for the Senator. It triggered a sense of “Look, we have an alternative in 1980.” Coming into ’79, with the new session of Congress, it was still like pulling teeth in many ways to get something accomplished—not just to raise the issue of health care but also to advance the other liberal issues that Kennedy cared about.

In 1979, talk about Kennedy possibly challenging Carter in 1980 continued to grow. The polls and the press began testing Carter versus Kennedy. The extraordinary support for Senator Kennedy obviously influenced him as well. As the spring turned into summer in 1979, he was seriously thinking about it, there was a sense that this might be ours for the asking. There may
have been some overconfidence in the sense that we needed to do a lot of work if he were going to run for President. I can’t think of a particular time when the decision was made, “Yes, we’re going to do it.” I think the decision happened over the summer, when the Senator was up at Cape Cod talking to family members, talking to a couple of other close advisors.

Young: That would have been in the summer of ’79.

Parker: Yes, summer of ’79. When he came back from the Senate August recess that summer, the decision was pretty much made.

Young: I think he talked with Carter about national health care in February of ’79.

Parker: Yes, he had a few conversations with him. I don’t remember February of ’79 in particular, but I know that he had some fairly serious conversations with him. My impression is that by ’79—

Young: The die was set.

Parker: The die was also moving away from the fight over health insurance. With so many people disenchanted with Carter, and with the Democratic Party clamoring to do better, people were worried about 1980, and the Senator began to think seriously about running. In his early conversations in ’79, if I recall, there were at least one or two occasions when he basically told Carter, “I know we have some disagreements on the issues, but I tend to support you for reelection.” But that began to fade as summer approached, and it was clear that he was beginning to change his mind.

By hindsight, it’s clear that a lot of concerns weren’t being addressed about what he would have to do if he were going to run a serious campaign against Carter. In some ways, a lot of us were overconfident, but there was also a sense that once he decided to run, we could put it together. But once he decided, there was a lot to do that wasn’t getting done to prepare for the campaign. In hindsight, it seems pretty clear that if we had prepared more effectively, then by the time he had the Roger Mudd interview, which I think was in the early fall of ’79, September of ’79—

Young: He had it in August, but it was broadcast in November.

Parker: When people saw the broadcast of that question, “Why do you want to be President?” his answer became an instant embarrassment. I think the polls peaked at that point, and questions began to arise about whether Kennedy was ready to run. Carter’s people had been putting a lot of their efforts into a possible campaign, probably since the beginning of the summer, or at least by the summer recess, when it seemed likely that Kennedy was going to make a challenge. Consequently our campaign got off to a difficult start, and for a time it appeared that Kennedy might not be able to continue the campaign. We weren’t doing well.

The turning point, to me, was the speech he gave at Georgetown University in January of 1980, in which he basically said, “We’re still going all-out for this nomination. We still have an opportunity to win it. Here’s what I stand for. Let’s go out and win it.” It was clear that he wouldn’t just fold his tent and give up.
Young: There are accounts, I think, of Adam Clymer and perhaps other writers—was it after the Iowa loss or in the end?—having a decision meeting with Kennedy and several others—I think you were there—asking, “Is he going to concede? Is he going to pull out? What are the options to pulling out?” I don’t know whether the Senator had already made up his mind before that meeting or what it was for, but the meeting has been portrayed as the case for either quitting now or for staying in. And if he were to stay in, I think the idea gelled that he would have to run a different kind of campaign and stand up for liberal principles. Is that accurate?

Parker: I don’t regard that as a major decision. I think there were some in the campaign who felt, This is going south. Let’s call it off and pretend it didn’t happen. I never saw any of that in Senator Kennedy’s attitude. I think that has been the way he has been throughout his career on all of the issues, even on big political contests. [Mitt] Romney was his most difficult Senate opponent. But when the Senator’s back is to the wall, he comes out fighting, and I think he was in no mood to capitulate on that one.

I don’t recall a particular meeting that I thought wasn’t positive. I was more of an issues person, and I was doing some of the writing, traveling around with the campaign. I wasn’t a particularly close political advisor to the Senator. My preference obviously was not to fold the tent, and it seemed very unlikely that he would do so. I think he might have done so if Carter had already secured a majority of the delegates, but he wasn’t anywhere close to that.

The Senator often does something when things are going the wrong way on issues. For example, he’ll suddenly decide, “We have to give a major speech on issue X,” and he’ll choose an eminent forum—say, New York or the National Press Club in Washington, sometimes another city. He’ll give a major speech, and we’ll sell it to the press beforehand as “Kennedy’s going to give a major speech on this issue.” Usually it gets a lot of attention, and it shows that Kennedy will at least continue to fight on the issue. Even though the odds are against him, he will not give up. This is a test of a lifetime of politics. He wouldn’t throw in the towel.

Young: Did his campaign themes change? Did they get broader, more liberal?

Parker: Yes. I think it became more of a left campaign than a middle-of-the-road, moderate-Democratic campaign. To some extent, in the early part of the campaign, we were responding to Carter. We were dealing with issues that the Senator was concerned about, pointing out the problems with them. We weren’t issuing a clarion call for, “Let’s go back to the New Deal, the New Frontier, or Harry Truman’s Fair Deal.” These things would appeal to bread-and-butter America. The major decision, as the new year began, was that there would be a new type of campaign. We weren’t just going to continue campaigning. When people said, “We should give up. We haven’t been doing well enough. We have to shift into a different gear and become more effective,” it seemed to have the result we were looking for, at least initially.

There was a lot of enthusiasm after the Georgetown University speech. The Senator has always found it inspiring to talk to crowds of young students. For example, there were others in the audience too, obviously, but the speech he gave for [Barack] Obama at the beginning of this campaign, in January of 2008, reminded me of the speech he gave at Georgetown at the beginning of 1980. He laid out the case for his liberal principles. The strategy, in part, had been,
“You have the base. Now go for the moderates.” But when people began questioning, “Is Obama ready to run for President?” it was clear that the Senator thought he was.

We didn’t have much of a campaign when Senator Kennedy first announced in November of ’79, but by the time of the Georgetown speech, we had a well-arranged, well-managed campaign. We like to think, in retrospect, that if we had had that campaign in place in November, December, and January, instead of having just started it in January, the outcome might have been different.

By January of 1980, the Senator felt, *We’re going to see this all the way through as best we can. We’re certainly not going to give in until there’s absolutely no chance that we can prevail.* There were some people in the party—mostly Carter loyalists—who felt that this would be very damaging to the Democrats’ overall campaign in 1980. A lot of them still feel today that without Kennedy, Carter might have been able to defeat Reagan. Who knows?

**Young:** Many years ago, I was doing an oral history interview with Ham Jordan. I asked about Carter’s defeat, and he said, “We had double-digit inflation, we had the hostage crisis, and we had Ted Kennedy running against us. We might have been able to survive two, but we couldn’t possibly survive all three.” [*laughter*]  

**Parker:** Two of the three.  

**Young:** This was some time after it was over. A lot has been said about Chappaquiddick coming up in the campaign or in the polls as more of a negative than the Kennedy folks thought it would be. They thought they’d passed it. Is that a correct interpretation, that you didn’t expect this to rear its head?

**Parker:** We knew it would be used against him. We didn’t think it would be a significant problem with our Democratic constituency. We weren’t sure how it would play with Independents or with Republican voters. It didn’t seem to be as big a problem as the difficult start of the campaign. Most of the people I worked with in the campaign weren’t seriously troubled by it. I think he made the case for what happened. He would always respond that it was a tragedy. He said, “Nothing is going to steer me away from devoting my full energy to the causes I care about.”

In the end, I think people felt that whatever might have been happening at the party, it was certainly an accident, and he was lucky to have survived. That seemed to us to be the prevailing view of the people we were likely to reach. In terms of the people for whom Chappaquiddick was a significant problem, we felt that we didn’t have much of a chance to win their votes anyway. They were basically Republican loyalists.

**Young:** Was there a suggestion that it was being used against him by the Carter folks?

**Parker:** Not that I remember. I don’t have a sense of what was happening all over, whether they were using it in commercials in some parts of the country, but the campaign certainly wasn’t anything like today’s campaigns. The campaigns are much more intense and negative today than they were in 1980. In 1980, we were still living through the ’60s and ’70s. I’m no expert on what has poisoned the atmosphere lately, but I think that the very partisan, very negative campaigning has infected the way that Congress deals with issues.
Kennedy certainly didn’t hesitate to use negative campaigning about Romney’s record in their 1994 Senate race. You often see articles saying, “If you think there was rough stuff in this campaign, wait until you see what John Adams said about Thomas Jefferson,” as though politics is a contact sport. As people say, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.” It didn’t seem to me to be as poisonous, at least in my view, in the late ’60s, through the ’70s, and through most of the ’80s. It certainly wasn’t that way in the Carter-Kennedy campaign.

**Young**: The character assassination, the politics of personal destruction, you’ve seen episodes of that early in history, but it hasn’t been the norm, I think, in campaigns.

**Parker**: No. If both sides are throwing mud, how do you know who the right person is to lead the country?

**Young**: In the old days, they used to call it a “calumny.” “A calumny has been spoken.” [laughter] Anyway, in July of ’79 Carter gave his speech from the mountaintop, from Camp David, often called the “malaise speech.” Carter’s numbers were not looking good.

**Parker**: No.

**Young**: It was not only the party who thought he was not looking reelectable. Was that a feeling?

**Parker**: Oh, yes, definitely. The more the speculation heated up, the more the liberals became outspoken and the more they questioned Carter. I think that contributed to Senator Kennedy’s sense that this was an opportunity and that we were going to do our best to make the most of it. Despite the initial problems in getting the campaign up and running, we eventually were up and running. As I said, there was a sense that things might have been different if we had been better prepared in 1979. The huge question was—and obviously you can’t second-guess—does the Senator really want to do it? I think the staff, to some extent, deserves some fault for not being as ready, by hindsight, as we could have been if the decision had been, “Yes, let’s go.”

**Young**: But if you had been ready, word of this would have gotten out, wouldn’t it have?

**Parker**: It might have.

**Young**: Might not that have had a negative effect?

**Parker**: No, I don’t think so. My feeling is that there was enough talk about it already, certainly by the time of the Roger Mudd interview. The malaise speech kindled the fires too. “If he decides to run, what should we be doing to get prepared?” Perhaps we should have brought on a press secretary for the campaign or have had a campaign organization in place in order to see what we could have done around the country.

I think there was a feeling starting. That’s why Mudd wanted to do the interview. There was a sense that Kennedy might well be getting into the campaign, and there was ample justification for a lot more groundwork to be laid. Maybe it wouldn’t have been sufficient. I don’t know. Carter’s apparatus was obviously functioning at full speed by November, when Kennedy announced.
One of the stumbling blocks was that the Senator had invited Carter to be present for the dedication of the Kennedy Library in November of '79. I think the Senator felt it would have been inappropriate to formally launch the campaign before that event. That was part of the reticence in moving forward more quickly. It’s an open question whether, absent that, he might have moved forward earlier. He wanted to be deferential to President Carter, and in a way, he was also being deferential to his brother. He cared a lot about the library, and he wanted it not to be a partisan event.

Young: It went without saying that the President would have been at the opening of a Presidential library anyway.

Parker: Yes.

Young: So when that was scheduled, when it was put in the works—

Parker: That affected the timing.

Young: Yes. It wasn’t scheduled earlier, even if it could have been. It was a question of the calendar not allowing it to work. The Faneuil Hall speech happened on November 9. Hostages were taken three days earlier, and I wonder how that—

Parker: That clearly was a negative. By coincidence, I think it immediately enhanced Carter. The country was in the midst of a major foreign policy crisis, and here was Kennedy undercutting him at one of the most difficult times Carter faced. I think that led to what was called Carter’s Rose Garden strategy. He didn’t have to go out and campaign against Kennedy. He was just going to be President, and it would appear to the public that Kennedy was undercutting his diplomacy and his attempts to deal with the crisis.

Young: Foreign policy had not been a high priority.

Parker: A strong point.

Young: But it hadn’t been high on Kennedy’s agenda either.

Parker: No, it hadn’t.

Young: And suddenly a surprise occurred.

Parker: It was totally unexpected, obviously, and it worked against Kennedy politically. There was more of an excuse for Carter to dismiss Kennedy’s campaign. He could say that he had more important things to work on. That was a serious blow to us, just as the campaign was formally beginning.

Young: As we were told in the Carter oral history, there were people within the Carter group who were very much against the Rose Garden strategy, to the point, in retrospect of course, that they felt he did irreparable harm to himself by hiding in the White House and not getting out.

Parker: It’s anybody’s guess. You could spin it one way or the other.
Young: There were some knock down, drag out battles within the staff, with some of his advisors. But I think you’re right. In retrospect it’s clear that it put the President above the campaign fray. The decision to recapitulate was emerging. There wasn’t one moment or one thing that tipped it. Was it because he wouldn’t appoint [Archibald] Cox? Was it because everybody has a story to tell, not in the oral history but in the national commentary, about what it was? Some say it was just a personal animus. What I’m trying to get in the oral history is somebody who saw it coming and then saw how it evolved, how the Senator came to the decision to run. He wasn’t planning to do this all along.

Parker: No, not at all. I think it emerged gradually after he decided not to run in ’76. I think he expected that the next campaign would be ’84, so he wasn’t thinking seriously about 1980 until Carter’s problems began to emerge. The fact that Carter wasn’t on his wavelength on national health care was an important issue in terms of their relations, but it didn’t make him decide that he should challenge him for the White House. It helped lay the groundwork for it. The change of attitude in the country and the disaffection of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party became more obvious. People were turning to Senator Kennedy as the one who, more than any other possible contender, would champion their cause.

There was reluctance on the part of Senator Kennedy to jump in. It took him a while to decide. It was a pretty serious thing to challenge a Democratic President. If Ford had been elected in 1976, the Senator might well have announced earlier that he would be a candidate, but with Carter in the White House, I think he wanted to do it respectfully. I don’t think there was one single factor that turned on a light switch. He was aware of the public opinion that the country needed to move in a new direction, but before he would run, he needed to be reassured that his family situation would make it realistic for him to do it. Both of those things evolved.

Basically he saw a deadline approaching. He knew he would have to make a decision by Labor Day of 1979. He felt, I can’t let this drag on into the new year. To some extent, he may have felt that If I’m going to do it, I don’t want to jump in late, when other Democrats are already out there. I think that was a factor but not a major factor. He said, “If I’m going to do it, I have to do it the right way. We should have plenty of time.” I think he did it on a timeframe.

He gradually adjusted his thinking to the point where he may have had a meeting with his family up on the Cape and decided, “We can do it. Do you all agree?” I don’t know for sure that that happened, but it’s quite possible. I think that events were heading that way anyway, and it would have surprised many of us if he had decided not to do it. I think his family could have persuaded him, “Not this time either.”

As I said in the earlier interviews, he has a different attitude toward the Senate than either of his brothers had. I think he felt a sense of obligation to follow in their footsteps if the country needed him to be President, if people wanted him to be President, if they had said, “You can’t just stay in the Senate and watch the President take the country in the wrong direction.” But at the same time, I think he felt a sense of satisfaction in the Senate that his brothers never felt. Did I mention the story that Clare Boothe Luce used to tell?

Young: We may have it, but tell it again.
Parker: There was a famous story about Clare Boothe Luce, who knew the Kennedy family through the father, through *Time* magazine and Time Enterprises. She knew young Jack Kennedy when he was a Congressman, when he was a Senator, and when he was President. She used to tell this story: “When John F. Kennedy was a young Congressman, he wasn’t all that happy in the House of Representatives. He used to say, ‘This isn’t where the action is. I have to get to the Senate.’ Then he became a Senator in 1952, and after a few years in the Senate, he had the same reaction: ‘This isn’t where the action is. I have to get to the White House.’ I always wondered what he thought after a couple of years in the White House.” [*laughter*]

Young: Actually he was asked a similar question in a press conference on his first anniversary in the White House: “What do you think of it now that you have the Presidency?” He said, with that wonderful half smile, “I thought it was a hell of a lot more powerful before I got here than I found it to be.” There was that famous Harry Truman story, you know, “Life’s going to tell you to do this and do this, and nothing’s going to happen.”

It’s good to have this in the oral history, because the Senator’s situation was different. It was evolving, and he didn’t go in with a plan to get to the Presidency. His attitude was, if he were called, he would come. This was different from his brother John’s campaign. It was more like, perhaps, Robert’s decision to enter. Events were building, and they drove him to it, although I think it was a slower moving process than Robert’s.

Parker: Oh, yes, much slower moving. I wasn’t part of the Robert Kennedy campaign, but he obviously held back and didn’t want to challenge Johnson. When it became clear, because of Vietnam, that [Eugene] McCarthy was doing well in the primaries, everybody said, “You have to get in,” and he did. The JFK campaign apparatus was still relatively intact and ready to move. In 1980 we didn’t have a campaign ready to take out of the closet, dust off, and go with.

Young: Do you want to talk about the trip to China, which happened during this period?

Parker: Sure. This was in December of ’77, into ’78.

Young: Carter had been in the White House for less than a year at that point. How did this trip come about? Was it just an outing, or was there a purpose to it?

Parker: The Senator wanted to be more active in foreign policy issues after the Vietnam War debate had wound down. We’d had a couple of excellent foreign policy staff people. During the Vietnam War, it was Bob Hunter. Then when Bob moved on, the Senator hired Jan Kalicki to be his foreign policy advisor, and he gave him a portfolio of important issues.

Young: Where did the foreign policy advisor fit into the Senator’s staff arrangements?

Parker: On his personal staff.

Young: But the advisor didn’t have a committee assignment.

Parker: No, but I think he felt that he couldn’t be an effective Senator without good, sound views on foreign policy. Leading into ’68 and ’69, when I arrived, there wasn’t a foreign policy person. Then Bob Hunter came along at the end of ’69, if I remember correctly, and he stayed for
about four years, and then Kalicki replaced him. Once the Vietnam War was over, people turned
more toward a worldview. David Burke used to handle foreign policy when he was the Senator’s
chief of staff in the late 1960s.

Young: Dale de Haan worked on some refugee issues.

Parker: Yes, that was through the Judiciary Committee, but that was treated separately. In some
ways that may have led to some of the Senator’s basic background and involvement in the issues.
He was at least familiar with them because of his work on refugee issues.

One of the things he did on a number of those early trips was to go with a list of people he had
learned about who were dissidents or prisoners or who otherwise needed his help. Whether it was
the Soviet regime or the Chinese regime or others that were willing to see him, he would take a
list of 10 or 15 such people, or more. He took a list of 22 such names to Beijing. The Senator saw
China as one of his major initiatives in foreign policy. It demonstrated that he was involved and
was looking into Asian affairs. With China becoming the emerging power in Asia, he felt that he
needed to go there. Partly it was because we had an excellent advisor at Harvard, Jerome Cohen.
I don’t know whether you’ve interviewed him.

Young: I haven’t. Should we?

Parker: You definitely should in order to have the complete story. Jan Kalicki can tell you quite
a bit about China. Maybe you’ve already talked to him.

Young: No, we haven’t, but he’s on our list.

Parker: Jerry Cohen was a China scholar at Harvard. I think I mentioned in other sessions that
the Senator liked to have think-tank meetings and to bring in outside experts. For one of those,
we decided to focus on China. It was probably a year or so before we went to China with Cohen.
We brought Jerry Cohen down, and he and the Senator clicked. Cohen is a very appealing guy.
He obviously knew a great deal about the People’s Republic, and he opened Senator Kennedy’s
eyes to a wide range of China issues. He painted a vivid picture of China and the importance it
was likely to have as it developed, both for our foreign military policies and for our economic
policies. The Senator wanted to go there to learn more about what was going on.

Nixon had gone to China, and that, of course, made China an issue that politicians needed to be
familiar with—

Young: The Shanghai Communiqué.

Parker: —yes—if they expected to be taken seriously as well-rounded Senators, or even as
potential Presidential candidates, although in Kennedy’s case it had nothing to do with a possible
Presidential campaign. There were very few Senators who had gone to China. I’m not sure of the
facts exactly, but I don’t think that any Senator had met with Deng Xiaoping in China before
Kennedy did. I think Senator Kennedy felt that this was an opportunity for a breakthrough. That
was one of the attractions of going. In his contacts with the Chinese Embassy, the Senator was
led to believe that if he were willing to come to China and to meet and get to know something of
the Chinese people, then the Great Leader would be willing to meet with him.
Young: We didn’t have full diplomatic relations, did we?

Parker: No, because for years, China insisted that as a condition of establishing full relations, the U.S. would have to recognize Taiwan as part of China.

Young: Leonard Woodcock was liaison or something. I think this was before we broke relations with Taiwan.

Parker: That was one of the huge issues to deal with: how do you handle Taiwan? At the time, we had full diplomatic relations with Taiwan and a national defense treaty with the island as well, as though it were still China. Senator Kennedy gave a speech in Boston in the summer of 1977, urging the Carter Administration to correct that anomaly by severing our current official ties with Taiwan and establishing full diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic. Doing so would automatically end our mutual defense treaty with Taiwan as well.

That was clearly controversial, and people began asking, “What’s Kennedy doing? Is he selling out Taiwan?” That was very difficult in some ways, but Cohen had a very effective answer to all of these arguments. The United States simply couldn’t pretend that China didn’t exist, and that Taiwan was all there was. We expected China and Taiwan to resolve their differences peacefully, and our position clearly left open the option of coming to the aid of Taiwan if the Chinese attacked.

There was much talk about a two-China policy or about a one-China/one-Taiwan policy. There were many ways of framing it. The reality was that there was one China and it wasn’t Taiwan. It was the People’s Republic, and the question was, how could we resolve the issue in a way that avoided a military outbreak or full-scale war over Taiwan? It’s not clear how we would have reacted to a Chinese attack on Taiwan. But China certainly felt that we would have retaliated if they had attacked, and they weren’t willing to take that risk at the time.

With regard to the trip by the Senator, the Chinese also felt that bringing Ted Kennedy in meant that instead of simply dealing either with the Republicans, as they had for several years, or with the Carter administration, they could deal with a liberal Democratic constituency in the United States as well. They could at least get to know him and show that they were talking with him.

Young: Had the White House yet formulated a position on China?

Parker: No, but the Senator worked closely with the State Department in preparing his speech on the issue that summer.

Young: I think that was yet to come, because Carter eventually normalized relations.

Parker: There was a lot of talk about what we should do and how we should do it. The only precondition was that whatever settlement was worked out, it had to be a peaceful settlement. We wouldn’t give China a reason to invade Taiwan, nor would we provoke Taiwan into being belligerent toward China. Senator Kennedy absorbed all of the talk about it, and I think he felt it was a part of the world that he was interested in seeing.

Young: So he got Jerry Cohen.
Parker: So he got Jerry and we put together a family trip. It was a huge delegation.

Young: What did the administration say about this? Were you briefed by them?

Parker: Yes.

Young: How did that work?

Parker: Our relations were good with Carter at that time. We had our differences, but he, as much as we, were interested in talking with the Chinese and seeing what could be done to achieve a peaceful solution. I don’t think there was any problem. If the Chinese invited Senator Kennedy, Carter wasn’t going to stand in the way. They facilitated it, and as far as I know, there was no problem with the Carter administration.

Young: Did you get Zbig [Zbigniew Brzezinski] or [Cyrus] Vance? Did you talk with anybody at that level?

Parker: I don’t recall whether Kennedy himself was briefed. I know that Cohen and Kalicki made the rounds. They talked to the State Department and to many China scholars, both in the government and out. Cohen knew a lot already. He was an expert on U.S.-China relations. I think the Senator recognized that Cohen was one of a kind. You couldn’t ask for a better person brief you on China or take you to China. He was not only willing to go, he was eager to go.

Young: You had no yellow lights from the administration?

Parker: No, not that I recall. If anything, there was a green light. Carter was not interested in creating a foreign policy controversy over “Why can’t Ted Kennedy go to China if he wants to?” Their attitude was, Let him do what he wants to do. We can clean his clock no matter what. They certainly were somewhat arrogant in their dealings with him. “I’m the President, Senator. This is what I say, and this is what we’re doing. Go ahead. If you’re going to China, that’s fine with me.” But at the same time, the Senator went there with an agenda, and number one on the agenda, obviously, was to sit down with Deng Xiaoping. I think the hearts were beating pretty rapidly on that trip, waiting to hear whether we would get to see him, and it finally happened.

Young: Had you made the request?

Parker: Oh, yes. That was a condition of the trip basically, and there was a feeling when we got there that something could go wrong or that some extraneous event might make him unavailable.

Young: He would be sick or something.

Parker: But that didn’t happen. They kept us waiting while they scheduled it. There was a time when we felt that maybe it wasn’t going to happen, but the Senator’s attitude was, “We’ve come a long way. Let’s make the most of what we have while we’re here.” We had meetings with other government officials, and we saw a lot of China. It’s an incredible place to visit. We were very touched by it all.

Young: The Cultural Revolution wasn’t long over.
Parker: No, and the Chinese went out of their way to be hospitable to us. It wasn’t as though we were aliens or foreigners who had a grudge against China. The Chinese seemed to be on their best behavior. Even the crowds in the streets were enthusiastic. They liked to see Americans coming in.

Young: How did you manage to seal the invitation and get to see Deng Xiaoping?

Parker: I don’t know what finally did it. The Senator, in his gracious way, made it clear that he felt he had been promised a meeting, and that was why he had come. The Senator joked with them, saying, “Of course, if he has pneumonia or something—” But at the same time, I think he left no doubt about the reason for the trip.

Young: Well, there was talk about Jerry Cohen’s calls to his wife.

Parker: To his wife, yes. Assuming that the Chinese were listening in, he expressed his concerns that they weren’t treating Kennedy with the importance he deserved.

Young: Quite an important person. This was done for the unacknowledged audience.

Parker: Jerry probably had a lot to do with it, in terms of his camaraderie with the Chinese, speaking their language and being able to deal effectively with them in a gregarious way. In the end, I don’t think they were going to let Kennedy go home without the meeting, once he had made it clear that he was counting on seeing Deng Xiaoping. It wasn’t just, “We’d be grateful if we could see him,” but rather, “I came here with an understanding and your commitment that I would be able to see him.” He did it in a way that left no doubt that he expected them to fulfill the commitment, but he didn’t do it in a threatening or belligerent way. He has a gracious manner that can easily assuage the concerns of others.

Young: Did he feel that it was a productive meeting?

Parker: Yes.

Young: In what sense?

Parker: I think he felt primarily that they had a good conversation about Taiwan. The other issue was his list. There was a Johnny Foo on the list who was seeking to visit his parents in Massachusetts. None of the names on the list was released immediately, but the following summer Foo and his wife arrived in Boston with visas allowing them to stay. The Senator felt that whatever direction relations took, at least there were a few positive human-rights benefits to a trip like that. The Chinese seemed to bend over backward to accommodate that.

They welcomed a visit by an American who talked to them rationally about a peaceful settlement on Taiwan, and who was not interested in threatening China. We thought it was very important that they settle their differences peacefully with Taiwan. The Senator would be helpful as a peacemaker if he could. They recognized that his allegiance was primarily to the Taiwanese, but at the same time, he would caution the Taiwanese not to be belligerent toward Beijing.
They sensed that they were dealing with someone who understood their side of the issue, but who also felt very strongly that there were serious differences over human rights and over their attitudes toward Taiwan, which we could talk about sensibly. In the months that followed Foo’s release, all 21 of the other names on the Senator’s list were released as well. Senator Kennedy took it, I think, as a sign of good faith that things had worked out well on his visit, and U.S.-Chinese ties were improving.

He found the same thing in his visits to the Soviet Union in terms of bringing out people who had been imprisoned there. He felt that a trip like that was worthwhile in order to bring out a well-known dissident who had been unfairly imprisoned. He went, for example, to Moscow not expecting anything but to come back with at least a few prominent dissidents. Their release usually made headlines, and the Senator appreciated the publicity. But he cared most about the human-rights symbolism. He felt that every little bit helps. The Soviet Union was not as anti-human rights as they were caricatured to be. It had an atrocious record, but there were ways to deal with them and to make at least modest progress.

I think he went to China thinking the same thing: that their leaders are not in an ivory tower. They can’t dictate to the world. They have to be aware of the world’s feelings about them. When the Senator was in Beijing to meet with Deng Xiaoping, what did the Chinese people think about that? We were sure that went through Deng Xiaoping’s mind. It was in their interest to not have a disappointed or angry Senator Kennedy leave China. They had a strong reason to be cooperative to at least some extent, and the Senator found the discussions very positive. All of us on the trip thought it was a magnificent trip. The politics and foreign policy aside, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Young: Did you travel by train mostly?

Parker: Plane. We took some train trips. They had cars that drove us to some nearby sites. It was very enjoyable. The Senator had a great time there with his family. It was a family outing as much as anything.

Young: Patrick [Kennedy] was along?

Parker: Yes.

Young: He was just a boy.

Parker: Yes, he was ten years old. Everybody came away thinking, *What a beautiful trip.* I think it encouraged the Senator to do more of that, to visit places he likes or to visit places where he has an active Senate interest, a public interest, a political interest, or a historical interest.

Young: He went to Shanghai.

Parker: Yes.

Young: There were some interesting exchanges there. A man, a provincial governor I guess it was, had survived everything. Kennedy asked him how he’d managed. It came out that he had never found anybody guilty. *[laughter]*
Parker: Yes.

Young: Do you remember that?

Parker: No, I wasn’t there, but I’ve seen that story.

Young: There’s a human face to Chinese politics too.

Parker: There was an amazing exuberance to the Chinese people. It was as though someone from outer space had landed. They had heard of the Kennedys, and all of a sudden there was a member of the Kennedy family right in the midst of their city or standing on their Great Wall.

The Senator felt that it also strengthened his foreign policy credentials at a time when he was trying to build them up. That was one of the consequences as well: foreign leaders recognized that Ted Kennedy was showing an active interest in important spots around the world. It opened other doors for us. It’s hard to tell how significant it was, because if Edward Kennedy had wanted to go to any country, there probably would have been an opportunity to do it. But by visiting China, people began to take him seriously as a person who knew his foreign policy. To me the China trip was important for bringing that about.

Young: Yes, and he had a serious interest in learning from them and in building bridges where he could. He has a truly remarkable international standing and reputation. It’s what he stands for. He goes to them and he learns about them. He’s doing this even before he’s thinking about the White House, I think.

Parker: Yes. To some extent the foundation began with his work on refugees, recognizing that these were oppressed people. He cares about the underprivileged and the oppressed in the United States, but he also sees people from around the world living in horrible conditions and his heart goes out to them. There’s a deep sense of compassion in him. He feels that he has the power to make a difference in their lives too, not just in the lives of U.S. citizens. He feels that he ought to try to do as much of that as he can. In terms of his civil rights interests in this country and the fight over apartheid in the ’80s with the Reagan administration—Bobby Kennedy had been to Cape Town at one point in the ’60s. The Senator still quotes lines from Robert Kennedy’s speech there. He hasn’t been to Cuba yet.

Young: Didn’t he go to Guantanamo?

Parker: Yes.

Young: With Senator [John] Warner?

Parker: Yes, but not to Cuban territory.

Young: He didn’t go outside the compound. He had done a lot of traveling in Africa earlier.

Parker: Oh, yes, and also in Latin America.

Young: Were you involved in his Latin American trips or contacts? How about Chile?
Parker: Argentina. No, I didn’t go on any of those trips. That was mostly our foreign policy team. I was on an outer ring, involved to some extent. Depending on what you are concentrating on, we can give you a list of the foreign policy staff people who were most involved in those trips. Mark Schneider was one, for example.

Young: We haven’t gotten many in foreign policy. We’re doing this now.

Parker: Mark did a lot of trips to Latin America.

Young: Mark is on the schedule. Jan Kalicki is on.

Parker: Nancy Soderberg.

Young: Nancy has been interviewed recently. We’re talking with Sharon Waxman. Can you clarify for me when she came on board? Has she always been in the foreign policy area?

Parker: Yes. I’m not sure what year she was hired. She has been here six or seven years now, maybe a little longer than that. In terms of Iraq, she is the one.

Young: What are the names of the people who were involved in the foreign policy area? Maybe I should send you a list of the names we have called in the foreign policy area and you could add to it.

Parker: That would be good.

Young: I should have brought the list with me. I know that Greg Craig is one of them. I’ve been thinking that he doesn’t have time for it now. That was my only reason for hoping that Obama might not win, that it might make Greg available. I do have to make a request of him to do this.

Parker: I’ll dig out the dates they were here.

Young: Let’s talk about your Christmas parties.

Parker: I think I could get a list of them as well.

Young: I’d like that.

Parker: It started by chance in the mid-’70s. We used to have a Christmas party every year for the staff, and the Senator would drop by. We’d have soft drinks, cocktails, and hors d’oeuvres in the Labor Committee hearing room or another large room in the Senate. He’d spend an hour or more with the staff, and spouses and children would usually come too. We’ve been doing that since the mid-’70s. In 1976, by chance, Larry Horowitz, who was on our health staff at the time, said, “Why don’t we dress up or something?” So he got a couple of other staff members and they all dressed up in costumes.

Young: Was he on Broadway by then?

Parker: That came later. Larry got a “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” costume, and he came in looking hilarious, complete with antlers and a big bulb of a red nose. He had one or two other
people dressed up with him, and he got everyone laughing. We went away thinking that was fun. A year later, the Senator said, “Last year’s party was pretty good. Why don’t I dress up as something this year?” It turns out—and I wasn’t aware of this before—that he loves to go to dress-up parties. He has them at his house on occasion, and he decided that he’d start doing it for the Christmas party. In 1977, I think, we had the first one. He might have dressed up as Santa Claus.

[BREAK]

Parker: We began putting on Christmas skits in the late 1970s. I don’t have in hand exactly who the Senator played. I think he mostly dressed up as Santa Claus in the early years. It wasn’t until 1986, according to the record I have, that he dressed up as a lighthouse. Instead of just putting on a Santa Claus costume, he decided, “Let’s go a little—”

Young: Probably one of the lighthouses on the Cape—Nauset Lighthouse, something like that.

Parker: Yes, right. I think it was a Cape Cod lighthouse. It really got rolling in 1987, when we did a skit of Oliver North and Fawn Hall.

Young: Who played Oliver North?

Parker: The Senator played Oliver North, I think. I can’t remember.

Young: In a Marine uniform?

Parker: And Fawn Hall was just a blonde with a big wig on. In 1988 he came as Elvis Presley, and in 1989 as Batman. In 1990 he was Milli Vanilli. In 1991 we decided not to have a skit because of the Gulf War. Nineteen ninety-two was one of the best. He had just married Vicki [Reggie Kennedy], and she decided that she wanted to take part too, so they dressed up as Beauty and the Beast. You can imagine who was the beauty and who was the beast. [laughter]

Young: Yes.

Parker: In 1993 the Senator dressed up as Barney, the dinosaur from the kids’ show. That was very successful too. The Senator looked great in his dinosaur costume. A lot of people were talking about Kennedy as a dinosaur in the Senate, and here he was, dressed up as one at the Christmas party. It was a beautiful-looking costume. The Senator had a big dinosaur head on. He came out and everyone roared. As he stepped up to the microphone to begin the skit, he took off the costume head so that he could read the script. As soon as he took it off, a child in the front row began to scream bloody murder, as though something terrible had happened. She couldn’t believe that her favorite dinosaur had lost its head. Her mother had to quiet her down and calm her and say, “No, that’s not the real Barney. He’s all right. This is just someone pretending to be Barney.” [laughter] It was very amusing.
In ’94, after the tough campaign with Romney, he did a skit of himself and Romney in the debate. Usually these skits just made light of whatever serious event had happened.

**Young:** Did he play himself in the debate?

**Parker:** Yes.

**Young:** Who played Romney?

**Parker:** I can’t remember who we got to play Romney.

**Young:** Vicki told me to ask you, who did you play?

**Parker:** I never played.

**Young:** You didn’t play? Did you wear costumes?

**Parker:** No, I didn’t wear a costume.

**Young:** I thought she showed me a film. She said, “Look at Carey Parker there.”

**Parker:** Typically I was just standing in the background. What year was that?

**Young:** I don’t remember. Okay, then one year he came as the Lion King.

**Parker:** He dressed up as the Lion King, mocking himself as the lion of the Senate. Sometimes he’d choose the theme based on the popular movie of the season. One year, *101 Dalmatians* was the popular movie, so he and Vicki dressed up as Dalmatians. Then the next year it was Anastasia and Rasputin, making jokes about his trips to Russia and things like that. Then we did the Phantom of the Opera, with Kennedy as the phantom of the Senate. Then ’99 was Austin Powers. In the year 2000, Al Gore had just narrowly lost the Presidential election to George Busy, so he came as the Grinch Who Stole the Election.

Because of 9/11, we didn’t have a skit in 2001, but in 2002 we did Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez. In 2003 we thought of a lot of possibilities, but we decided not to have a party because of the Iraq War. In 2004 we did a Take Me Out to the Ballgame theme. The Senator dressed up as a Red Sox baseball player. Two thousand five was another big success. He dressed up as King Kong. In 2006—people loved this one too—*Happy Feet* was the popular movie. The Senator and Vicki dressed up as two penguins. This last Christmas, in 2007, they dressed up as their two dogs, Splash and Sunny.

**Young:** So after the marriage, Vicki was in.

**Parker:** Vicki was in almost all of them.

**Young:** And did they always dress up?

**Parker:** They would both dress up.
Young: Was there a script?

Parker: Yes, they had a script. We had some great outside joke writers who helped us with the lines. We’d tell them, “This is the theme, and anything is fair game.” So with a theme like, say, Barney, there’d be jokes about dinosaurs—Republican dinosaurs, Democratic dinosaurs, whatever was current in the news. There were opening jokes, such as the Senator might give at the start of a speech—one-liners typically. The Senator would make a brief statement about something, and then Vicki would say, “What did you mean by that?” and then the Senator would give a funny line. Then they’d do the opposite and Vicki would give the funny line. They used to rehearse quite a bit. We’d weed out things that we didn’t think were funny, and we’d add a few that would work. It was always a lot of fun, and we’d spend about a week getting it ready.

Young: Oh, my goodness.

Parker: It’s fairly easy, we found, to get good costumes. You have to rent them, so they’re somewhat expensive, but whatever you want to dress up as, there’s a costume that’s perfect.

Young: When you had your rehearsals for this, who was the audience?

Parker: Just the three of us usually, Vicki and the Senator and me. We’d hash it out, and they’d decide whether something was too much, or one of them would say, “I don’t want to be so mean to so and so,” or, “Let’s toughen it up against so-and-so on this one.”

Young: I hope you have a recording of what you said.

Parker: Some of them are recorded. We have the scripts for them. Maybe they should be part of your oral history project. The Christmas party started out as a routine cocktail party that nobody paid much attention to.

Young: Office party kind of thing.

Parker: It began to develop a bit of cachet. When people found out, they wanted to know, “When’s the party? I want to be there.” We’d usually have it in one of the larger Senate hearing rooms, typically the Labor Committee hearing room. But that room couldn’t hold the overflow, and sometimes people would be lined up outside the door trying to get in because they wanted to see Kennedy. We always had rules of the road, which we’d announce at the beginning. Our staff member Melody Miller would come out and say, “It’s all off the record. No recorders, no photographs.” So there aren’t many photos of these costume parties.

Typically at the last dress rehearsal, perhaps the afternoon before the party started, Senator Kennedy and Vicki would stand in the office and someone would take their picture. He has a couple of them posted around here. There’s one in the bathroom of him in the Barney costume.

[laughter] But it was a lot of fun. People would start roaring and they wouldn’t stop. It got to the point where you could say almost anything deadpan and people would laugh.

Young: He also had his birthday parties. Didn’t he dress up for some of those?
Parker: Yes, for some of them they did, usually for the major birthday parties. We’ve had some in the office and they’re not dress-up, but out at his house, they were dress-up parties, sometimes for Christmas, sometimes for his birthday, and everybody comes as whatever they want. The Senator sometimes invites a singer from Broadway if he’s willing to come. We’ve had a couple of well-known singers drop by over the years. One of the lifebloods of these parties, during the time he was on the staff and often afterward, has been Nick Littlefield. Maybe you’ve talked to him about this?

Young: No. He has talked about singing and playing for Senator [Orrin] Hatch and others, but he hasn’t talked about the parties very much.

Parker: Sometimes we’d have an office party for which we’d do songs, and Nick would be involved in preparing those and certainly in leading the singing. He has an excellent voice. I don’t know if you know the story about Nick. His father very much wanted him to go to law school. He was very interested in music when he was in high school and college, and he had enough talent that in college, people said, “You have a potential future career in that. You have a beautiful voice. They could use you on Broadway.” A Broadway play, a musical, hired him to be part of the chorus for a year, and his father said, “I’ll let you do it for just a year, but you have to be making progress.” He was part of the chorus in Kismet.

When you listen to him sing at a party, you can tell that he’s a very good singer, very good indeed. Of all my friends, no one has as beautiful a voice as Nick. He loves to team up with the Senator to sing. The Senator, at a lot of parties, will say, “Come on up here, Nick,” and Nick will come up. The Senator will stand beside Nick and they’ll belt out a song together. The Senator is great at doing that. He keys his music off of Nick to some extent, but he has a great singing voice too, and he loves to sing. He’ll sing at the drop of a hat at an event like this, whenever there’s an excuse.

Young: What are his favorite songs?

Parker: There are a lot of them. I think Danny Boy is one of his favorites, or When Irish Eyes Are Smiling. He tends to like the Irish songs, but he likes to sing some of the modern tunes too. It takes a little practice to get used to them, but the ones he’s most familiar with, I’d say, are the Irish songs. He can get the whole room singing When Irish Eyes Are Smiling.

Young: Well, is that it for today?

Parker: I think that’s it. Sounds good.