Young: This is an interview, October 16, with Lee Fentress, in Charlottesville. Lee, I don’t think I’ll go through any of the preliminaries here about the ground rules. You’re pretty familiar with them, and they’re understood, but I’m going to let you determine the starting point here, to hear about some of your times with Ted Kennedy. Maybe you want to talk a bit about how you came to connect with him. There’s a lot of Louisiana prologue, and RFK [Robert F. Kennedy] prologue here. Maybe you want to talk about that.

Fentress: Sure, Jim. My first recollection of actually seeing the Senator was here at the University of Virginia. I was a second or third year student, and we had a little group called the Student Legal Forum, and we used to bring speakers in. Two of our guests at the university, probably my third year, were Senator Kennedy and Senator John Tunney, who I think at the time was in the Senate; he’d left the House. They came down to the Student Legal Forum, came back to their old digs. They came with their two glamorous wives, and were bigger than life.

As we were sitting there in the Forum, with us was a dean here by the name of Hardy Dillard, who had taught both these fellows. Hardy was a very grand man who had been on the World Court. I remember looking up at Hardy Dillard, and he had gone to sleep. I couldn’t really decide if he did that for show, to let everybody know that he was not impressed. That’s a little story about Hardy. But they were magnificent. We came out to Farmington, where we’re sitting today, after the talk, and it was a wonderful evening, to see them both. That was my first meeting with him.

Young: That was what year?

Fentress: That was probably 1965. He would have been in the Senate three or four years. That was the first time. The next recollection of seeing him is—I went to Washington after I finished law school and was in the U.S. Attorney’s Office for a couple of years, and when Robert Kennedy declared in March of ’68, I found myself in the Senate Caucus Room, which is now the Kennedy Caucus Room. Chris Dodd just sponsored the move to have that renamed for the three brothers.
I was watching Robert Kennedy declare, and then went back immediately to the U.S. Attorney’s Office, resigned that day, and was on a plane that night to California with a dear friend, John Nolan, to help prepare what was going to happen in California. I remember, I went in to the U.S. Attorney, David Bress, and I thought he was going to be absolutely furious that I’d resigned, because he really expected a three-year commitment and I’d been there two-and-a-half years, something like that. He said, “My God, How did you get to do that?” He really wanted to talk about it. I had a plane to catch but he wanted to talk: “Oh, tell me about Robert. How did you get to know Robert Kennedy? How’d you do that?” And he said, “I’m jealous.”

**Young:** “I would like to be on that plane.”

**Fentress:** He wanted to come along. Anyway, it was very nice. My recollection during that campaign, during the ’68 campaign, was seeing Senator Ted Kennedy in some meetings in Indianapolis. I did a lot of advance work. That was the first political experience I’d ever had in my life and I was over my head as an advance man, but it was a wonderful time.

I happened to be in some meetings there with [Theodore] Ted Sorensen, Larry O’Brien, Joe Dolan, and others, when planning for Indiana, and I remember the Ted very well. He was always very respectful of his brother, in this context, and tended to speak when spoken to sparingly. He was just very respectful and gave a lot of quarter to all of Robert Kennedy’s staff people who had been with him for years, people like John Douglas, who later became a great friend of Ted’s. That was my first recollection of just how sensitive, how thoughtful, and kind of reserved he was—being available, giving all of his help, speaking wherever he was asked to. I’m sure he had a lot to do with all the strategy, but he really did that with his brother privately, not in meetings, was my sense. I have that recollection and that sense of his sensitivity and deference to the different groups of advisors. A lot of the Robert Kennedy campaign staff were holdovers from his brother’s, from the President’s administration, and Ted was really of a different generation, almost.

Even back then I somehow had a sense that he had a great concern about being on time that he had gotten from his father. Somehow we ended up doing a motorcade route through Gary, Hammond, and Whiting, for Robert Kennedy, the night of the primary. We routed this motorcade through all sorts of local neighborhoods, and it ended up being very long and slow due to the crowds in upstate Indiana. It went on and on and on, and of course resulted in the candidate being very late for a final appearance in Indianapolis.

I’m told that Teddy was there, waiting and waiting, and finally, he had to go out and address this group for his absent brother, and he was not prepared. He hadn’t thought about what he was going to say because Robert Kennedy was in the northern part of the state on this idiotic motorcade that went on and on. He was about three hours late. I was told later how furious Ted Kennedy was. He wanted to know who the heck had organized this thing. Why didn’t we have better appreciation of his time, to put him so late?

Those are my first recollections of the Senator. Then, some time later in ’68, the end of the year, we began to play a lot of tennis together in the mornings.

**Young:** This was at the house in McLean?
Fentress: It was, yes.

Young: You had played also with Robert, hadn’t you?

Fentress: Yes, I had.

Young: Well, you were a tennis champ.

Fentress: I posed as a player.

Young: Posed? Come on.

Fentress: I used to get phone calls when in the U.S. Attorney’s Office, from Angie Novello, who was Robert Kennedy’s secretary for years, at Justice and also at the Senate, saying, “Could you come on over later today, at 5:30? The Senator would like to play.” It was usually during the summer when Ethel [Skakel Kennedy] and all the kids were up at the Cape. Here’s the poor Senator, home alone, wanting to get some exercise, not knowing fully what to do, so we’d go over and we’d play for an hour and maybe have a drink, and then I’d go back to Georgetown.

Sometime in late 1968 we ended up regularly playing three or four times a week, at 7:00 or 7:30 in the morning at the Senator’s house in McLean.

It was interesting: You’d drive in the driveway and the Senator would always be waiting in the driveway, and it would often be in the teens, the temperature. We always used to kid if he ever put on long pants, because he used to wear shorts and it would be literally 30 degrees outside. I remember sliding over that tennis court with ice, all of us saying, “My God, we’re going to break a neck here.”

He would always be out there with his two cans of balls, standing there waiting for us in the morning at 7:30. We’d walk up that hill to play and have a doubles game. It was really a lot of fun, the camaraderie. Then we’d come back, take a shower there at the house in one of the bathrooms, and then we would all have a breakfast in his den, a light breakfast, and talk for 30 or 40 minutes, and we were all off to our various endeavors. It was a special time and you really got to know him and have fun during those times.

Young: You were a regular there. Were there other regulars?

Fentress: It was a mixture. John Douglas, who was a dear friend and advisor, was a regular there. Mike Feldman played a few times, who was President Kennedy’s White House Counsel. John Tunney played a lot. Dave Hackett, who was a great friend of Robert Kennedy’s, was a regular. Frank Craighill, who was my partner, later played a fair amount. Donald Dell played some. We had a regular group. And then we had some others—I’m trying to think—Fritz [Ernest] Hollings and Claiborne Pell used to come over. It was a wonderful group. We had a lot of fun.

The real fun games were with Tunney, because there was a real camaraderie and competition. When we played with John, the Senator would always—Somehow by chance, I would end up playing with the Senator, and we couldn’t resist running John unmercifully. We would lob over
John’s head and John would run back, and then we’d lob to the other side and he would run over, and these points would go on and on and on. The Senator and I would just have tears running down our cheeks at John running. He was very competitive. But John would have started off, as we went up the hill, by announcing that, “Gosh, I haven’t really played at all,” laying the foundation that, “I’m not really up to snuff.” It was a lot of fun and it really brought out the tomfoolery in all of us. It was a special time.

Young: And there was no politics about this?

Fentress: Well, in the mornings, over breakfast, we’d discuss what was going on. We would ask, because we all loved to hear what was going on with the great issues of our time: the civil rights bill, the Senate debates, and all of the things that were going on. So we’d love to hear the stories.

Chris Dodd used to come over and play a fair amount as well. I’m trying to think who were the other Senators. There were a number. Bennett Johnston came over. Fritz Hollings was particularly good fun.

Young: How long did these regular tennis sessions go on?

Fentress: Oh, we’d play for an hour, no more, 7:30 to 8:30.

Young: I mean in terms of years.

Fentress: Oh, in terms of years, I think from about 1969 until I left Washington. Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] and Teddy decided to leave McLean, to sell that big house, and they moved into Washington, into Kalorama. I lived on Hawthorne Lane, and a fellow across the street, Joe Allbritton, had a tennis court, so we moved the games over there to my house, and we had the breakfasts there. At this point, it was usually a Saturday. We played in Washington for about three or four years, so it continued on, gosh, up until 2005 or 2006, something like that.

Young: How did he do this with his back?

Fentress: He did it. Often, but not always in the mornings, he would have a corset on his back under his shirt, for support. Otherwise, you could never tell when his back was bothering him, and when it wasn’t. I have to say that, in 40 years, I never heard him complain one time about his back. He never mentioned it at all. It was astounding. You could see that he was stiff. He could run very well laterally, but up and back was a little more difficult. But boy, was he competitive. We’d get to points that were really important and there was nothing he wasn’t going to run for.

Young: He was a killer.

Fentress: He really was competitive, and he was as good stroke-wise as he was with the repartee, reminding somebody that it was a very big point coming up, and “We’ll see how you play it.” There was a great deal of kidding. But it was a factor with his back, always, but he did it. He played.

Young: So, you’ve talked about how you began with him, how you came to know him.
Fentress: Yes. I later chaired the Board of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial—but before that, I used to see a lot of the Senator because of a tennis fundraising event for the Robert Kennedy Memorial. It was a pro–celebrity event at Forest Hills and the Senator played every year and I’d see him there.

And we’d have dinners. We began to see him and see his children. It was primarily social. I might have gone on a couple of trips with him during the period of time, just as a pal. Then I chaired the Robert Kennedy Memorial and he was on the Board, so we had a lot of contact.

Young: That would be in the early ’70s?

Fentress: During the late ’70s, early ’80s. He was very interested, and while he didn’t go to every Board meeting, he really wanted to be kept totally apprised. It was important to him, what we were doing, what the issues were. We’d talk about that quite a bit, so he knew it. Then probably a couple of years before he married Vicki—I should know the year he married Vicki—

Young: Ninety-two.

Fentress: Yes, ’92. So, even in the late ’80s, he began coming to Maine to visit with us in the summer. He’d sail his boat up to Maine and stay with us at Tenants Harbor on the coast, about halfway up the state. Later, in 1984, we moved about 20 miles further up the coast to an island called Islesboro. Ted had often sailed there with the President and Robert, to visit an old friend, Doug Dillon, who was, of course, President Kennedy’s Secretary of the Treasury.

Young: Yes.

Fentress: So he knew the island, and the waters, well.

It was astounding: Teddy and Vicki would sail the boat up, take it right from Hyannis Port and sail through the canal and come up alone, which was quite a venture. I mean, you’re out in the ocean there, miles from—As you sail Downeast, you’re miles out. They would have a wonderful sail, often overnight.

Young: This would be an anniversary.

Fentress: Yes, it was sort of an anniversary. Yes, their first anniversary, they stayed with us. It was a little bit after, but they spent their first anniversary up there. We had wonderful times in Maine. Of the seventeen years of their marriage, I would say they came up every year, with the exception of three or four years.

Young: So you played tennis with him and you also sailed with him.

Fentress: Yes.

Young: How was he on the boat? Did you race with him?

Fentress: Never. I never raced with him. You know, I raced up there, or I tried to, in Islesboro. We have a great fleet of Dark Harbor 20s, a boat that was designed by Olin Stephens, a gorgeous
old boat, much like the Wianno Seniors that he raced as a kid. These are smaller boats. These are just day-sailors.

Teddy was so nice. He would go out and watch me race. He would be on the Mya, this massive, gorgeous schooner. He would be under power so he could follow us, rather than under sail. There was always a great deal of—there was slight pressure, with the Senator and everyone watching, knowing full well that he was pulling for us, and we wanted to do well. I remember a couple of times, we always had great starts and then would fall back, make a bad tack, and then would come back and he would say, “You know, Lee, you had a great start, and here’s why.” We’d talk through it. He was not overbearing in the least, but so thoughtful and constructive. He had forgotten more about sailing than probably I’ll ever know, to be truthful.

He was truly a great sailor, and instinctive. Vicki later came onboard with her love and knack for instruments and a GPS [Global Positioning System] that was a godsend. It could tell you exactly where you are in the deepest of fogs. Ted liked to go by instinct and his senses. In analyzing my races he would say, “You had a great start, but why tack so early?” Then he’d say, “You had too much weight in the stern of your boat. You should be over the keel. You’ve got to get that weight right over the keel.” He was just marvelous with those things and it helped a great deal. Not only was he a great racer, but he was also just a great instinctive sailor. I don’t think there was anything that he treasured more than being at sea and being on the water.

Oh, and I take it back; we did race Mya in Maine. There were two summers during which a wooden boat regatta was held, and we raced in it and did well. The schooner, Mya, did very well downwind, with the wind off your stern or off the back. Jim, I’ve heard you had a sail on Mya.

Young: Yes.

Fentress: The boat really did well downwind, but in pointing, it didn’t do as well, because a schooner just doesn’t point as well. So we would always look at that course as it was being set, hoping that it had a lot of downwind, and that the wind would shift and go to the stern, because we’d do better. And he would get every inch of sail up he possibly could. I remember going through the Eggemoggin Reach, passing boats. He had all these sails up, including the fisherman. It was really fun.

At the windward mark, we were way behind, and then the wind went to our stern and we passed just about the entire fleet. At the finish we missed one buoy and went on the wrong side of it. So we finished the race and came up to the committee boat, and I think we were second, or possibly, on corrected time, won the race. Everybody on the committee boat was applauding and the Senator said, “No, we passed on the wrong side of a mark back there. We’re DQed [disqualified].” So we were out.

The Mya is a handful. She’s got so many sails and you really have your hands full. He and Vicki handled her alone in the early years, but in more recent years he’d generally have somebody onboard, a youngster who was strong and fast.

I remember, three years ago I came up and spent Labor Day with Teddy and Vicki at the Cape. We were all going to sail over to Nantucket. When we woke up, there was a strong Nor’easter, one of the nastiest days you’ve ever seen: 43 degrees, a driving rain, waves, winds of 25 to 30,
small craft warnings, not a boat in sight, of course, and he said, “Let’s go. We’re off to Nantucket.” Vince Wolfington, a dear friend of Ted’s, and a couple of young boat people were with us and away we went. Gosh, it was a day that we were all—We had foul weather gear from head to toe, stocking caps. It was a day not fit for man nor beast. But that was irrelevant.

All I could think about was, If something broke on this boat that is over 60 years old, we’re all toast. If you had a Coast Guard SOS—they’d never be there for hours. We didn’t see one boat all the way to Nantucket, which was about four-and-a-half hours. To give you an example of his acumen and his competitive sense: He was determined—As you passed the buoy leaving Hyannis Port Harbor, with the breeze where it was, if he kept pinching up and kept trimming the sails, bringing that boat up on a beat and not falling off—if you kept the boat up, we could make the buoy, 25 to 30 miles ahead, without a tack. So we were feathering up for four hours, waves crashing over the bow, a little cup of soup, maybe. By golly, we got into Nantucket Harbor, and we missed that buoy by about 20 yards. We made it.

We came in and met the ladies, who had all come over by ferry. We had a wonderful lunch with Judge [Edmond] Reggie, Vicki’s dad; and her mom, Doris, and spent the day in Nantucket, and came back that night on the ferry. We didn’t sail back. Thank God.

Young: Oh, I see.

Fentress: It was wonderful, the weather be damned. You know, if you’d made that choice on your own, you’d say, “God, let’s not do this.” But he—that was never a question. And looking back on it, you’re just so doggone glad you did it. It was a moment together, a fabulous sail.

Young: The stormy times showed his skill and instinct. He was very observant. He’d see things, read the weather, read things in an almost uncanny way, it seemed to me.

Fentress: Oh, he was truly one of the great sailors, really, that I’ve ever been on a boat with. You know, he would race the 12 meters up there and do well against Ted Turner, and some of the great sailors, like Ted Hood. He always had a pretty good crew aboard, but he was world-class, to be sure.

Young: There were also times—I mean, I went out on the boat a few times with him, but these were mostly times of silence. Thinking.

Fentress: Reflective.

Young: Very reflective. A little conversation now and then.

Fentress: He took it all in. He just loved the sea. In actual fact, because of his back—You know, he used to love to play tennis, and he was a good golfer. I played golf with him a few times in Maine. It was always difficult on his back, but he had a great golf swing. He played with his brother, the President, who many say was the best Presidential golfer ever.

But later, as his back got worse, he didn’t have many options. He couldn’t jog or take long walks. That was all he had left, so that was his sport. That was his sport. To be sure, he loved sailing, and that was his outlet, not that he would ever complain about that. That was his
recreation, but it was more than that, as you’ve pointed out, Jim. It was a part of his life, it really was. He just absolutely loved the sea.

**Young:** He told me once, and he’s said this to others, I’m sure, that the sea is a metaphor. He saw the sea as a metaphor for life.

**Fentress:** He had a great quote from President Kennedy that he sent me, and I’ve misplaced, that President Kennedy said once, at the America’s Cup, that we all are part of the sea. Our body is three-quarters salt. “We have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears.” It was a wonderful quote.

For him to get back to the Cape was always a special time. He had a wonderful place in Boston, a small apartment on Marlborough Street, right off the square there. It was a convenient, nice place, but I’d bet he spent five, six nights a year there, because if he was ever in Boston, he was going to end up at the Cape. Even if it meant a drive back and forth for a meeting the next day, or some event in Boston, he would get out to the Cape. It was like [Winston] Churchill said, “A night away from Chartwell is a day lost.” He certainly felt that way about the Cape. He loved being there.

In February of this past year, February ’09, we were so fortunate. We got a chance to go down and spend the weekend in Miami with Teddy and Vicki, for his birthday, and he had the *Mya* there and we all got to sail every day. We had about three or four nights there in February of this year. His condition was beginning to take its toll. He was having trouble moving around a bit, but it was a happy, upbeat time.

Of course the Cape is rather dismal in February, as wonderful as it is, and he didn’t want to be back in Washington. He never said, but my sense was that he couldn’t be as active there, and it was going to be such a push-pull about the office on a daily basis, and the grind, and then the Cape was dreary. So Vicki, in a brilliant stroke, found a house right on Biscayne Bay in Miami that, lo and behold, had a wonderful protected slip where the *Mya* sat right next to the house. It was a perfect spot. To the west, you could see the entire skyline of Miami. To the east was the ocean and it was a quiet, private place.

The group was Jean [Kennedy Smith]; Nick and Jenny Littlefield; Vince and Alicia Wolfington; Vicki; my wife, Diane [Fentress]; and me. On Saturday night, she brought down the star of *Mamma Mia!*, the Broadway play, and we had an evening of songs from Broadway. Of course, Nick regaled us with some of his songs, and had some duos with the Senator. It was a special time.

I remember Mass in the house the next morning. The priest was terrific. He was from a parish down the street and came by to say Mass. As soon as we finished Mass, there was a moment for the sign of peace, to talk, and the Senator said, “Father, as today’s gospel tells us, it was an interesting time for the apostles. They didn’t have all the information that we now have. Do you think, had they, they would have asked more questions, been more inquisitive?” He drew upon his knowledge of the gospel, the scriptures, and the apostles to pose this deep and penetrating question. I remember seeing this priest, poor fellow, looking absolutely bedazzled, thinking, *My God, how do I answer this?*
Young: Yes.

Fentress: A wonderful colloquy followed. It was obviously a glimpse that we all knew—of his faith, and how important it was. And you almost had a little, one or two percent, that he may have been having a little moment of fun, putting the good Father, not on the spot, but, I’m going to have him go through his paces here this morning to wake him up, to give him a little shot of adrenaline.

He loved doing that. At my daughter Caroline’s [Fentress O’Donnell] wedding, he sat at our table at the wedding, and we had a wonderful priest there who was a graduate of the University of Virginia Law School. He had practiced law and then he had gone back and become a priest. I remember laughing because Teddy started quizzing him: “Well, what do you think about this?” “Come on, Father, don’t give me that.” It was hilarious. The good Father was in hysterics after a while, after he finally got the drift that he was being challenged in a playful way, about theology and the doctrine and the rigid aspects of our beloved church. It was really funny.

Young: That playful side of him is something most people, except those very close to him who see this in him, didn’t really appreciate.

Fentress: He absolutely loved the humor. Once, several years ago, I had the opportunity to represent some government officials in Mexico, and found myself in Mexico City at the behest of the Foreign Minister, at briefings and dinners and meetings, when Vice President [Walter] Mondale came in for a bilateral with the President of Mexico, [José] López Portillo, at the time. And there was a very proud Mexican official, Hugo Margáin, who was the head of the Ministry of the Interior. He had almost became President before. He was from an old, very distinguished family.

The Foreign Minister, my client, would have me ride in the car with him and send the Minister of the Interior to a car in the rear, so he could talk to me alone. I used to shake my head, thinking, This is real trouble coming. Finally, I got a call from the Foreign Minister, right in the middle of the visit, and he said, “Lee, I’ll tell you what. We’re going to have you and your wife—We’ve arranged a plane and a place in Las Brisas, in Acapulco. You’re on that plane at 8:00 in the morning.” I said, “Well, fine, Santiago [Roel Garcia]. What’s this about?” Apparently Sr. Margáin had gone to the President and had threatened to resign that day unless I disappeared—fast. He had said, “This is an insult to me and the sovereignty of the country.”

I told this tale to Ethel when I got back, as a funny story. Two days went by and I got a call on the phone at home, at about 9:00 at night, and it was a voice saying, “This is El Mundo, the leading paper in Mexico, and we have a story on the record about what happened when you left Mexico City last week. What was the issue? Why did you leave in such a hurry? We heard there was a bit of a dispute and we would like to know the bottom of this. Was there something about your being there too close to the Foreign Minister?” At this point, my God, my heart was in my throat—Of course, it was the Senator on the line. He went on for ten minutes, and I was—I mean, to say that he had me is an understatement. It got so bad that he finally had to stop, and he was laughing so hard. That was a typical kind of thing that he really loved.

Young: So he could really act the part.
Fentress: Oh, he could do it. And he loved to do impersonations. He was marvelous at that. He used to do great impersonations of a great advisor to President [Harry] Truman and many other Presidents—Clark Clifford. He used to do some great impersonations of him. Clifford was very distinguished, and I don’t mean this in any disrespectful way, because he made wonderful contributions to several administrations, but he described the way Clifford rendered advice in a grand and dramatic manner with global views that went on and on.

For instance, if you were talking about Vietnam, he would go back into the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] Treaties, and Laos, Cambodia, and their respective histories. It would go on and on. He would finally come to the point, and then you’d see this great landscape mosaic that he had painted, and it all came together. But he said, “My God, it took a long time.” The humor was so prevalent.

Young: You were mentioning Clark Clifford. Did you want to—?

Fentress: Well, I mentioned the story only—You’ve got to talk to John Culver, but I’ll give you the outline very quickly, in case somehow it’s missed. It’s worth telling. This was told to me at the church in Boston a couple of weeks ago, at the funeral. John Culver and I were assistant pallbearers, standing outside the church waiting in a line with the others. It was pouring down rain, just pouring. Culver, I noticed he’s getting drenched even though we had somebody who was holding umbrellas for us. Culver looks at me and says, “My God, look at you. You’re totally dry, and I’m soaked. Where is my umbrella man?”

Anyway, Culver somehow started telling me this story. We were just standing there in the rain, waiting, and as only Culver can do, he said, “You know, I was sitting in the Senator’s office. I was his AA [Administrative Assistant]. It was early ’62, and Ted came in and said, ‘John, come with me. We’ve got to go down to the White House. Would you like to come with me?’ I said, ‘To the White House? I’d love to come.’” He was surprised. So they get there, go through the gates, and go into the Oval Office. They’re in the Oval Office and John is sort of looking around, and there’s Ted Sorensen, and there’s Clark Clifford, the President, and I’m sure Arthur Schlesinger, and a couple of other advisors, and possibly Mike Feldman, the White House Counsel. Clifford is sitting there in his chair.

The background to this is that, a month earlier, the Senator had been skiing in Vermont on a weekend, and there was a cameraman from one of the newspapers who kept following him down the slopes taking pictures. Ted said to the cameraman, “Please, do you mind? You’ve taken enough. Let me have my day.” In a moment of pique at the end of the day, after this fellow has hounded him all day long, Ted went over, removed the camera from his shoulder, opened the thing, exposed the film, and politely handed his camera back and said, “Thank you very much.” Lo and behold, there’s an arrest warrant that’s squashed, but charges. It seems that the fellow worked for the Manchester Union, for William Loeb, who we all know.

Young: Yes.

Fentress: That’s the background of the story. So they’re up at the White House and they come in, the Senator sits down, and John sits sort of off to the side, next to the President. Then Clifford starts going through this thing: “I’ve looked into this, Mr. President, at your request. I’ve looked
at the sensitive legal issues on this matter. Let me say that it probably would have been best, Ted, if you had restrained yourself and not taken it upon yourself to remove this film. It probably would have been advisable.” Well, we’ve got this group there. John Culver sees the President, out of the sight of Clifford, turn to Teddy and with his finger make a motion like, Na-na-na. *Shame on you.* I mean, like this.

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** So it was just wonderful to see the levity of the President, and his relationship with his brother, like, *Can you believe this?* That’s just an aside, but John is the story teller. You’ve got to talk to John.

**Young:** I’ll do that. Do you have some more?

**Fentress:** I remember the trip that we took in about 1986—we’ll check the dates—to Poland with the Senator. The purpose of the trip was to give out the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Awards. The recipients that year were three Polish individuals, one of whom had died. He was a priest by the name of Jerzy Popieluszko, who conducted the Masses for the Homeland, if you recall, Jim. The Communist regime was still in place.

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** [Wojciech] Jaruzelski was the President of Poland and you never quite knew what the status of that—what the Russians were going to do with regard to whether they were going to let Solidarity push them only so far, or were the tanks going to come in?

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** It was a delicate, sensitive kind of a balance there. You never quite knew. The President of Poland was a maestro at trying to politely push back Solidarity, saying, “I can only go so far, and then our dear cousins are going to come in from the East and pound us again, as they’ve done in history’s time.” So we made that trip.

Jerzy Popieluszko was the priest who had started saying Masses for the Homelands, for the independence of Poland. He did it at a church there, St. Stanislaus, right in Warsaw. It grew so large. Pretty soon there were people outside, thousands and thousands, and he was warned to stop saying these Masses. He continued to do so, and he was picked up and questioned by the authorities, and it was clear that it was getting more and more sensitive, and they were concerned about the balance and what was going to happen, how this was going to go down with the Soviets.

In the background was the Cardinal, in Krakow—I’ve forgotten his name. We saw him—who had taken sort of a stands-off approach. He didn’t really stand up for Father Jerzy. Not so with Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, who had just left Krakow. He was an anti-Soviet and was a real East-West warrior. He understood that thing well, and it was important to him to defend and stand with Father Jerzy. The word back from the Vatican was, “Anyone who harms Father Jerzy, harms me.”
About a year before we went there for this award, he was picked up by the police. Two days later they found his body in a ditch. He had been beaten, and he was dead. So, we went over to make this award to his parents.

**Young:** To his parents, OK.

**Fentress:** The other awardees that we went over for were Zbigniew Bujak, who was a labor leader—

**Young:** Solidarity.

**Fentress:** Yes, labor union, Solidarity—Zbigniew Bujak. And there was Adam Michnik, who was sort of a philosopher, historian, and political activist. They were the three awardees. So we went over to make these awards.

**Young:** When you went over—Am I correct in thinking that they were not permitted to leave, to come to the United States for the award? And that’s why you had to go—

**Fentress:** That is correct. I remember going over to the Senator’s house, for dinners, for about a week or two weeks before the trip. There we were all briefed by experts on the delicate Polish situation, what the issues were, what they thought the Russians were going to do or not do, and the sensitivity of the trip. As I recall, it took weeks for the Polish government to decide whether or not to give us visas.

The thorough briefings were just an example of the preparation and work that he gave to projects. We had briefing books, and Zbigniew Brzezinski came in, as I recall. Probably the best briefing we got, in looking back, was from Madeleine Albright. She, of course, understood that region very well. She was, at the time, teaching at Georgetown.

**Young:** What year was this?

**Fentress:** I would say it was ’85, ’86. It was before she became Secretary of State.

**Young:** So [Ronald] Reagan was in the White House.

**Fentress:** Yes. She gave a wonderful briefing. So we went over, and because it was a Robert F. Kennedy trip, the Senator graciously agreed, as always, to come make the awards. Of course, Ethel as well as several of her children came; Jean, Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford], and Eunice [Kennedy Shriver] also came. We had probably 16 people, a large delegation—Greg Craig and Nancy Soderberg were on the trip.

I remember the Senator said, before we were to catch the 5:30, 6:00 overnight flight, “Come to the house and we can all leave for the airport in a van.” Before we left his house he took me aside and said, “Lee, I’ve got a little task for you. I want you to keep these kids in line on this trip. That’s your task.”

**Young:** That’s a large order.
Fentress: It is. Anyway, off we went. One day of the visit we flew from Warsaw to Gdansk, the birthplace for Solidarity, and met with Lech Walesa among others. After a Mass there, I had the opportunity to ask Lech, “How often do you talk to the Holy Father?” He said, “Once a week.”

Once a week. Here was a Pope who generally doesn’t deal with people on a head-to-head basis, as we saw at the funeral a couple of months ago. He was talking to Lech Walesa once a week. He wanted to know everything that was going on in all parts of the country, and I’m sure he was, to a great extent, controlling how far Solidarity pushed. It was an interesting thing. Here was the Pope of the Catholic Church, certainly at the very least staying hands-on, on a daily basis almost, with what was going on in Poland, and for all I knew, was orchestrating a fair amount of it.

Everybody was really worried about—Because there were really big crowds wherever we went, we were worried that somehow we were going to push this thing over the edge, because Jaruzelski had sort of intimated that he and his government could only tolerate so much dissent and pressure. He was worried that he would have a message from the Russians, perhaps, or just feel, himself, that the Pope’s visit in two weeks had to be canceled. So it was always delicate, trying to not move too far, so that the Pope’s visit would be canceled because the Senator—or any remarks made that would be an excuse, or be a provocation for them to cancel the trip. It was an interesting time.

Young: So you had to be careful about the way you—

Fentress: I think he did. Yes, he did.

Young: Did they give you any trouble when you were there?

Fentress: No, not that I recall. I didn’t go on all the visits with him each day. I went off with Jean and Eunice and Pat one day, to Krakow on a day trip. We went to the university there, the Jagiellonian. It may be the oldest university in the West. I had a relative by marriage who had been president of that university, so I wanted to go and see it. It was interesting.

Young: Where were your charges?

Fentress: They were off seeing other things, maybe off to Buchenwald, or maybe to see the Black Madonna, the holy shrine there. They were busy doing other things.

I do remember one moment on that trip: We were in Gdansk and we were on a bus, and there were probably five thousand people gathered outside this church. The crowds were pressed up against the bus. There wasn’t a lot of security and there was very little help outside, and the bus driver for some reason started backing up, and you could hear the screams behind us. There were people right in the way of the bus, and everybody on the bus was yelling at the driver to stop.

I remember hearing this loud voice in the front of the bus, “Quiet! Sit down.” It was the Senator, and he had seized the moment. It was a very perilous moment. He just said, “Everybody sit down, get in your seat, be quiet,” so the driver could see, because it was pandemonium on the bus, and more pandemonium outside, with the enthusiasm of the crowd, and then the immediate danger of backing up. Nobody spoke Polish. We couldn’t talk to the driver about—It was just a
quick moment that showed his leadership. He just said, “Here’s what we should do,” and he was right on. On the back end of the trip, we all went to Rome and the Vatican.

Young: Did you have the audience?

Fentress: Yes.

Young: The whole group?

Fentress: Ted introduced each one of us to the Pope. The Pope gave all of us a rosary and we had a picture taken.

Young: And this was in his private workroom, wasn’t it?

Fentress: It was right off. It was in a room off his work area. We were getting a tour of the Sistine Chapel and I think it was right after the restoration. He saw the Holy Father before, and he was with him for about an hour, just the two of them.

Young: Talking Poland, no doubt.

Fentress: Talking Poland, and other world issues. I never really—You probably have that in one of your oral histories, I hope.

Young: No, I don’t.

Fentress: Well, you should talk to Vicki. That was before Vicki, but maybe she would know what was discussed. Anyway, it was a wonderful visit, and I do remember the Holy Father, how humble he was. You could see the humility. After every photograph was snapped, he would thank you, and go to the next person. It was interesting. It was a good trip.

Young: Any other trips?

Fentress: We went to Mexico City. This probably would have been late ’79, maybe the early part of 1980. It was probably 1980. López Portillo was the President of Mexico. At the time of the trip, he was weighing whether or not to run for the Presidency. It was on this trip to Mexico City that President [Jimmy] Carter okayed the ill-fated attack to free our hostages in Iran. Cy [Cyrus] Vance resigned, and the Senator issued a statement down there about Vance being the third Secretary of State in history to have resigned over a policy issue. Somehow the Senator knew that. It was interesting. I was quite impressed that he knew that Vance had been the third.

We started off in San Antonio, at an event there in San Antonio, and flew on to Mexico City and had a meeting, probably in the morning. We spent the night in the hotel there, at the El Presidente Hotel.

Young: What was the purpose of the trip?

Fentress: I think just for a bilateral with the President of Mexico. I was doing my work with the government there and was able to set that up.
Young: Was there a briefing that you know of, by the State Department?

Fentress: I’m sure there was. I don’t recall.

Young: Carter would have been President then.

Fentress: Yes. I don’t remember that, but there were the usual issues: immigrants, trade, migrant workers, human rights issues, and narcotics and crime. That bilateral, as we all know, is immensely important, the trading relationship, so he went down. And they were together for some time, an hour or so. They had a long meeting.

I remember being on the plane coming home and he took a quiet moment and sat down with a recorder and went through every detail of that meeting—where they sat in the room, the President, where he sat, what he wore, who was there, what they discussed—a picture of the room, in a sense. I was very impressed by the historical interest he had, that he thought this was worth noting, that it ought to be recorded. It was a laborious process, but ever was his eye on history and its importance for future generations. This dedication was so clear to me. It really impressed me.

Young: He showed me a number of his notes of conversations, and I’m wondering how far back that went. I think it went way back, writing up what happened on the trip, a diary of the trip. These included notes of conversations in Washington, not just on trips, and I’m wondering how much of that began, as you say, because it was obvious from his comments, from his notes—how much stemmed from an interest in history, and how much it stemmed from something farther back. When they went on trips, their mother would say, “Give us a report. What did you learn?”

Fentress: Yes, exactly.

Young: “What did you see?”

Fentress: I think he always felt that he was blessed to be in a position where he was able to do these things and to be perhaps a small part of history. It turned out to be no small part. But to be in this position, I think he felt an obligation that he should do this, for future generations to be aware and to learn. There clearly was a love of history, and the President had the same. All three brothers had this love of history, but he certainly did, and I think he felt a bit of an obligation to record this.

Young: Those are a tremendous treasury of things. When those papers and those notes come to light, they’ll be just a really remarkable…

Fentress: We met again with the President of Mexico, and it may have preceded the trip to Mexico—I’m remiss, I should know this. The occasion was in October, at the United Nations. The President of Mexico was there, as all the Presidents trek up to the UN in October and have their say at the United Nations. López Portillo was there and he was staying at the Waldorf.

I don’t know what we were all doing in New York, but I was able to arrange a meeting with the two of them—with Tim Hanan, myself, the Senator, López Portillo, and a wonderful assistant he had; [Jorge] Castaneda was his name. He was a wonderful gentleman who loved opera, so we
talked about that a little bit. This fellow helped set it up on that side. We spent about 45 minutes talking. It might have been the first meeting, I’m not sure, with the President.

I remember the President of Mexico said—He called him Ted—He said, “Ted, I hear you’re thinking of running for President.” He was a couple of weeks away from declaration and he said, “Well, I am.” Portillo said—It had to be a joke. He said, “Well, that fellow over there,” pointing at me, “He works for me. You can’t have him.” And Teddy said, “No, I beg your pardon. He’s been working for me for a long time.” Believe me, it was a joke, but it was nice and they were laughing. So we had that meeting with him as well.

You know, he cared greatly about Mexico and was interested in that bilateral. He had always been very involved in the human rights of undocumented workers. But no one hears about it anymore, “undocumented workers.” Now they’re “illegal aliens.” But in our vernacular back then, they were undocumented workers, and their conditions and the hardships, the exploitation, was always a great issue for him. He did that through the immigration and the committees as well.

**Young:** That may have been also connected with his very early concern with refugees.

**Fentress:** Yes. You know, we had a great trip about two years ago to Venice. We can take no credit for it. The ladies set it up. Vicki, and my wife, and Vince Woffington’s wife, Alicia, set it up. We all wanted to make some trips, and we ended up for a week in May of ’07, in Venice, because we really wanted to all go to Venice and just have a good time.

We went over there, and Vicki found this wonderful piazza that was a wonderful place that we rented. It was owned by some distant friend in England, who flew over from London to meet us in the morning as we came in. The trouble with the quarters—It was a gorgeous place, but apparently—The bottom floor, as you probably know, Jim, is where the gondolas come up, and that’s the piazza or something. The next level is where some of the staff might stay, and the third level is something else, and then the fourth level is where you stay, and the fifth level would be some other area. We stayed on the fourth level, which was wonderful, but the only problem with that is stairs. The good Senator looked at these stairs, looked at Vicki, and said, “My God, what have you done to me?” [laughter]

So Vince and I would take turns, and the good Senator would—I mean, it was excruciating for him to go up these stairs. He would put his weight—The first step was OK, the second step was a little less, and on and on. By the time he would get to the fourth flight, he would be mumbling, saying, “Where are you, Vicki? Come back down here and watch me do these stairs. You’re missing this. This is wonderful, Vicki.” I mean, just kidding her a lot. Boy, he would be wringing wet with perspiration just getting up there, and the weight on your shoulder to get up. Again, the significance is the difficulty—how his back played a major role in every day of his life.

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** But it was never a complaint. It was always, if there was something like this, he would laugh about it. He figured out very early—He said, “I’ve got two trips in me, guys, down and back, down and back, and that includes dinner. Other than that, count me out. I’m going to do this twice a day,” which he did, and we had a wonderful time going out. We’d start in the mornings and we’d see all the artwork and the Tintorettos and have a wonderful time.
We had a little game. The fellows would come back at dinner and we would sort of give a presentation of what we had learned today, and we liked to hear the ladies compare it with what they had learned, about the art, and the period, and so forth, and to see who did better. It was a lot of fun. We had dinner in one night, and the ladies all cooked for us, and it was fun.

The Senator did keep track of time and he knew when 6:30 came around, because it might be cocktail hour. We would all have a drink there and invariably he would ask me to put an opera tape on, because we had brought a couple of wonderful tapes of [Giacomo] Puccini, the operas. We shared a love of opera, but really a love of Puccini. We’d listen to all the operas. There we are, looking over Venice, hearing these great tenors and sopranos singing Puccini. It was wonderful. You really felt the essence of Italy.

Sitting up in Maine, I asked the Senator, “If you could die and come back, Teddy, what would you like to do?” He said, without a question, “I’d like to come back as a tenor. My God, the tenors have all of the gorgeous costumes. They have the wonderful voice and often, they get the girls.” And you can see him, and then you’d see him directing the symphony in Boston. You could see he loved music and he loved opera, but he particularly loved—He loved the arts. It was very important to him.

Going back to Maine—He had been to Maine every year of his life, starting when he was a young boy. I think his father let him—and Joe Gargan—sail up on their small sailboat, as a young fellow, probably when he was in high school, at one of his many prep schools that he went to on his journey there.

He had been up to Maine every summer and he knew those waters. I’m a junior up there. I’ve been up there about 25 years. He could tell me places to go. He was a frustrated tour director. He loved to tell people, “Now if you go to the back of this island, there’s a basin there, and you’ll see this basin, and you’ve got to get on high tide.” He would have these wonderful stories that he had been through there, but he wanted you to go and experience. It was important to him. It was all part of his real love of people and being concerned. He wanted you to experience it because it was important to him. He wanted to share that with you.

Sailing around there was great fun. I remember once going through a little harbor in Stonington, and it was a wonderful day and he said, “Do you see that phone booth over there? That’s where, in 1968 during the convention, I went over there, got off the boat—It was right in the middle of the convention and I called Steve [Smith] in Chicago, and I said, ‘Steve, what’s it look like?’” And Steve said, ‘Well, Senator, I think if you want to come out, Mayor [Richard M.] Daley’s aboard. It might not be easy, but I think you could probably—The nomination is in reach.’” That was the sense. And Teddy just said, “I can’t do it. It’s not going to happen. I’m not ready.” He pointed it out, “There is the phone booth that I called Steve on in ’68.” That’s a historical moment.

During summer visits in Maine, we’d meet in the morning at 7:30 and jump in my little pool there by the water, a little pool cut out of the ocean. It was cold as the dickens, but we would always meet down there in our robes and hop in the pool at 7:30. You didn’t linger in that water.

Young: This was no hot tub.
Fentress: No. We have a little cottage off our house there that Teddy and Vicki would always stay in. We’d have breakfast and that wonderful time in the morning, and sit around and talk for a couple of hours after breakfast, then off for our sail, maybe a quick nap in the afternoon. Always, at 6:30, he’d come down to watch the news. We’d watch the beginning of the news and then we’d go over to the MacNeil NewsHour, and he loved that. We would always talk about how thorough they were. But that was a great moment, which also coincided with the first cocktail, which none of us were going to miss.

We’d always have a wonderful dinner. After dinner, my kids would always be around, and it would just be the kids—I have four kids—and Diane, and me, and Vicki. He didn’t want, nor did we really want, to have a lot of people over. He just liked being—It was his time away. So we’d sit around and have a wonderful dinner in front of a fire. And then, always, we’d go in and either play charades with the kids, or go in and talk some more. It was wonderful, and he absolutely took a great interest in all four of my kids, and was so thoughtful.

I remember the last visit up—My daughter Caroline is a mother of five—She was a kindergarten teacher, and lives in Los Angeles now with her kids and husband. He was talking about his trip to Chile, and [Augusto] Pinochet, and all the things that went on, and he looked over at Caroline and could see that it was going right over her head. Without a moment, he stopped, and without talking to her directly, backed up and gave five minutes of background and set it all in perspective. That thought struck me—the perception, thoughtfulness, and being inclusive. He wanted Caroline to feel part of it. Very endearing. It was very sweet and sensitive. Anyway, it’s just a small little aside.

Young: He’s very perceptive.

Fentress: Perceptive, yes. And so we’d play charades and have wonderful games. It was really fun. Often, we’d stay up for another 45 minutes or so, talking. We talked about his parents, his mom and dad, and his kids. Four or five years, six years ago, eight years ago, I was talking about our house: What the hell are we going to do with this house? Who are we going to leave it to? We had four kids here. He said, “Exactly, I know the drill. Recently, I gathered my kids and discussed how matters would be handled after we go.” He was always very well organized and left little to chance.

I used to love to talk to him about different generations: about how his father was one generation, and how his father and mom had instilled into his generation the work ethic and the sense of duty and obligation, and how important that had been for him, and how being born in privilege and so forth, how increasingly difficult it becomes for the next generation. Of course, one of his major interests was the lives of all his nephews and nieces and the obligation he had to the family after he lost his brothers and his sisters. And I must say, you know, he never complained about that, about losing all of them.

Jean said something very interesting to me in Florida, when we were down there at his birthday in February. Jean said, just as an aside, “You know, I now really appreciate how lonely Teddy must have been through the years, after losing all of his brothers, because I feel that way, having just lost Pat; and Eunice is sick and not herself any more. I feel lonely and can only imagine how he’s felt all these years.”
Young: Several people have made that observation. That was a very difficult time for him.

Fentress: You know, I once asked him—probably in Maine, just talking up there—how the Senate had changed over the years, from the days of Scoop [Henry] Jackson, Phil Hart—the icons—[Warren Grant] Magnuson, and some of the other guys. And he said, “It has changed. To be sure, anybody who comes in, after a year or two is changed by the Senate, by the majesty and the power and the importance of the institution and the traditions.” But he said, “You know, I must say of some of the newer Senators—they’ve really gotten further than they ever thought they’d get in their lives and they spend every waking moment of their lives trying to figure out how to stay there.” That was a very interesting point. He didn’t mean it necessarily that derogatorily; it was just an observation that he had about how the Senate had changed.

Young: Yes. He talked a bit about that also. He mentions this in the book.

Fentress: I’m sure everybody has reflected on how hard he worked. My God. Every morning, we’d leave that house at 8:30 or so after tennis. He had somebody waiting in the car for him, to brief him on the way in, and the bag that he brought home every night and read. There was never a moment, I don’t think a day in his life, Jim, from the day he became a Senator, through the 40-some years, that he didn’t have a daily, typed-out schedule, by the hour, of what he was going to do with that day.

It was astounding. Think of our lives, to have someone type out what Jim Young and Lee are going to do between 1:00 and 2:00 today, 2:00 and 3:00, you begin to think, My God, do I have to…. It reminds me of being a lawyer in a law firm. Where do I go? By the hours. That was the work ethic. It was so apparent that there was never a moment to lose. Again, the sense of duty, obligation, and importance of the gift of the position that he had. He had to account for it and to do things and to change things. Boy, that work ethic really came through, and I’ll tell you, everybody would say, whenever he went into a room for a meeting, be it on the Hill, or the committees, he was the best prepared. Everybody on the Hill knew that there were two different levels of staff work: There were the other Senators’, and there was Kennedy’s staff. To say you worked on the Hill on somebody’s staff was one thing—

Young: To say you were on Kennedy’s staff—

Fentress: —was another level, another level. And boy, I’ll tell you, we’ve got a wonderful board at the Institute right now, that I have the honor of my life to chair. We sit around, and I often like to remind the colleagues what’s expected of all of us as we embark on building this Institute up there, the challenge, and how high the bar is, and we’ve got to meet it, that it can be no less. You’ve got to exceed any mortal expectations. As I say, we have a wonderful board and we’re making real headway.

You know, I used to talk to the Senator last year about the progress and how we’re doing. He wasn’t officially on the Board because of the fundraising and so forth. We kept him well advised of what we were doing, and he was immensely gratified to know, even two weeks before, the last time I saw him, that it was on track and going well.

Young: Yes. Do you have some more?
Fentress: A little quick story: I got a call in 1973, the day before Kathleen [Kennedy Townsend] got married. I got a call from the Senator’s office, or maybe from him, I don’t remember, asking if my oldest son, Andrew [Fentress], and I would be available that afternoon at about 2:00, for a touch football game with the Senator and Teddy [Kennedy, Jr.]. Andrew was probably ten or eleven. Teddy’s the same age. Teddy and Andrew have become friends. They’ve sailed together and raced together. And I said, “Well, sure.” And he said, “Why don’t we meet over at Ethel’s? We’ll meet at Hickory Hill.”

We went over and had a wonderful time, had a great day of touch football. I remember the score was tied, and I think Andrew and I went ahead a touchdown, and I’ve never seen the Senator try harder. My God, he was running around like a deer out there. I could see he was putting the extra mile of effort and energy into this thing. Lo and behold, Andrew and young Teddy ran into each other and had a collision. Young Teddy went down and grabbed his leg. Ted went over. Obviously, he was in real pain, young Teddy was. My God, I thought to myself. I didn’t know what to do. We were sitting there. “Are you OK, Teddy?” “Yes.” It didn’t seem like it was that bad. I was a little surprised, because the Senator seemed very attentive, whereas generally it was, “Come on, Teddy. Let’s rub it off. Let’s go.” You know, “Get up, take your knocks, and let’s move on.” But it was a tender moment with the two of them.

I remember going home, and the next day reading in the paper that Teddy had just left the hospital because Teddy Jr. had lost his leg. So it was the last day that he could get out. It was a moment that I remember, just the two of them together there, the thoughtfulness. Teddy wanted to have him out and have a full day there, and the tenderness of the dad and the son, you know, that day, the day before. And of course he went to the hospital the next day.

Young: The cancer had been diagnosed.

Fentress: Yes, the cancer, and he lost his leg the next day. That was all scheduled, and they knew it. Then Teddy, later that day, is giving Kathleen away at Holy Trinity. He left the hospital, in fact, to do that.

Young: Yes.

Fentress: I remember once, the Senator told me that the first time that he went to Vietnam—it was early in his Senate career. I think it was before the Tet Offensive. I don’t know, but it was early on. He went over there on a mission with two or three other Senators. John Nolan set up the trip and went over; he was a good friend of mine, as well as of Robert and Ted. John’s told me about this trip, but I remember him telling me about it. And it was before Robert Kennedy had come out against the war, and I think it was before the Senator from Alaska—Ernest Gruening was the first Senator to speak out against the war. He was the first one, and it was before he spoke out as well.

He came back having seen what he described as the most devastating destruction and loss of human life he had ever seen in his life, of what we were doing, what this country was doing over there, going through the villages with the defoliants, the gas, just the utter destruction of what was going on over there. He was just—it was depressing. It was a real shock and a blow to him. President [Lyndon B.] Johnson wanted to see him, and he went right to the White House and
relayed all of that. It probably was not exactly what the President wanted to hear at the time. He was utterly shocked at what he saw. It was sort of the first beginning to say, My God, what are we doing there?

**Young:** Yes. He made two trips. On the second one, Dave Burke had been with him. That was a trip where—he had learned on the first trip, not to let himself be scheduled by the military and with everything all arranged, and he managed to get around that. It’s really a very powerful story about how things had been set up to prove their point, and how he got around that.

**Fentress:** Exactly.

**Young:** Transporting blankets from one place to another—Well, this looks fine—but he wanted to go to the other places.

**Fentress:** Well, David would remember that time, so I’m glad you had that. Yes, it’s good. I remember, after 1980, how difficult the fundraising became immediately. Everybody, from ’72 to ’76, all through, saying, “The Senator has got to run.” In ’80, he finally did run, scheduling issues right out of the get-go: Roger Mudd’s interview at the Cape, with no one there, and no preparation. You know the background on that.

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** But then, he tells a great story: He declares at Faneuil Hall, as you know. He’s on a plane, flies to the West Coast, as did Robert Kennedy, to enjoy that full day of coverage, and somehow he ends up in San Francisco, at some talk radio station at midnight. Of course it’s 3:00 A.M. He’d had an unbelievably strenuous day, and somebody who’s sort of a salutary on a talk radio show, a fellow, says—this is sort of a throwaway—“What do you think about the [Mohammed Reza Pahlavi] Shah of Iran, who is down in Mexico, wants to come in, and he doesn’t have to wait in line to get a visa? He’s just coming right in. What do you think?” He gives an answer, knowing full well the immigration laws. He said, “I think he ought to wait in line like everybody else.” Boy, that hit—that was the “inhumane” posture of Senator Kennedy. It was his egalitarian sense of everybody standing in line together. He probably would have phrased it differently, but here he was at 3:00 A.M. in the morning on a talk radio show, laughing later, saying, “We got everybody’s attention on this.”

Then the fundraising got very difficult. I remember a couple of trips well after the campaign, fundraising trips, where he’d go down to Louisiana a couple of times and meet with Judge Reggie, who was Vicki’s dad, and who I met in 1968. We’d go to a dinner down there and they’d raise $25,000. They’d go down, have a dinner, spend the night, and come back. He was chipping away with small fundraising. He was going to pay that debt back, every penny. He wasn’t going to settle on any of it.. He wanted the vendors to get their money.

I remember being in front of a television one evening in Maine, and lo and behold, the news of Princess Diana’s [Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales] death came on the television, and the next day there were all the funerals. I remember some of our kids being interested in watching that. He would walk by that television and say, “Come on, let’s go. Let’s get out and do this.”

Looking back, I think he had enough sense of death, and passing, and tragedy, that—You don’t dwell on that. I remember he was touched, but boy, it was, Let’s move on. “Let’s go, kids. We’re
going to go out. Let’s get a tennis match. We’re going to go play tennis, and we’re going to go for a sail. Here’s what we’re going to do.” There was no morose time spent going over that. There was more to do. We had things to do. That kind of stuck with me.

There’s a newspaper guy, Charlie Bartlett, who used to have a syndicated column, who actually introduced President Kennedy and Jackie [Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis]. He was a great friend of the President. Charlie, early on—he knew that I was a friend of the Senator’s—used to always say, “Well, look, I love President Kennedy.” These guys all called him “Jack.” “I loved Jack, and Robert Kennedy had great promise, but I think Ted’s just a playboy. In fact, the Ambassador told me, Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy], his dad, told me, ‘Listen, Ted would be just as happy being on a beach in Cannes playing with the babes.’” I said, “Charlie, you’re just dead wrong.”

Ten years go by. Charlie and I had lunch from time to time. Charlie said, “You know something, Lee? I had dinner last night at the [Sargent] Shriver’s, and Ted was there. I talked to Teddy for two-and-a-half hours. We talked about everything. I’ve got to tell you, I’m dead wrong. He is everything people say he is, and I’m 180 degrees.” Interesting, you know? There was always a lot of—there was a little sense of that with some of the Robert Kennedy staff—some of the older staff, and the Senator knew that.

Young: Oh, yes.

Fentress: He sensed that some of the old-timers might think—Looking back in the early years, there was always a sense that there was Robert Kennedy’s staff, and there was Senator Ted Kennedy’s staff, and they were different. They were both excellent and worked hard. Robert Kennedy’s staff was, shall we say, more impatient to get things done? Ted Kennedy’s staff was as focused but, Let’s be patient, let’s listen, let’s adapt, let’s find a way. I mean, that wonderful story about passing the note in the Senate about, “How long do we have to sit here, Teddy?” And he says, “As long as it takes, Robbie.” You could sense that between the two staffs, and the personalities of the staffs.

Young: Yes.

Fentress: It was apparent.

Young: Was there much the same thing between John’s staff and Robert’s, or John’s and Ted’s?

Fentress: That was before—I was down here bouncing around in law school. I don’t know. I never met President Kennedy.

Young: There’s a fair amount of commentary that President Kennedy’s staff wasn’t too happy to see the brother run for the Senate.

Fentress: Oh, clearly. Yes, that’s exactly right. As you well know, the Ambassador said, “Now it’s Teddy’s turn.” I’ll tell you what I’ve kind of put together, and I bet you have, too, as you’ve been through these oral histories, is how close the Senator was to his oldest brother, and what a loss that was for him.
Jim, just one little aside that was interesting, and says something about him and his effectiveness in the Senate: When the vote came forward to send our troops into Iraq in ’03, he was obviously dead-set against it. He had heard all the testimony before the Armed Services, and had the intelligence, and so forth. He was joined by Senator [Robert] Byrd in opposition with one additional Senator.

Senator Byrd wanted Teddy to front it, and he said, “No way. I shouldn’t do it; I’m a lightning rod. You should do it, Senator. You’re the senior; you should do it.” They ended up with 23 votes, as you know. That was an important vote. “Bellwether” is the term I think he used. He said at one point that it might have been the most important vote he ever cast.

I know, too, that he had long talks with several of his colleagues—I’ll leave them unsaid here—saying, “Don’t do this. You’re making a mistake.” Now we know some Senators who would do anything to have that vote back. It could have changed history.

We had a wonderful weekend night a couple of weeks before the end with the Senator, at the Cape with Vicki; Nick Littlefield and his wife, Jenny; Vince and Alicia Wolfington. We had a piano player, and we sang. It was really a wonderful dinner. Boy, I’m telling you, you could look at those penetrating eyes, and if he couldn’t articulate everything that was on his mind at that point, there was a message there, and it was strong, you know? A sense of friendship. Everybody was so blessed to be able to have that last night with him, that last weekend, a couple of weeks before.

Young: Yes. How he spent the final chapter, once he knew it was the final chapter.

Fentress: Sure, and he knew. The last couple of times you’d see him, and look at him, he would look at you and not say anything, but there was a message in his penetrating eyes.

Young: Bob Dallek wrote about John Kennedy and called his book, An Unfinished Life. One thinks about Ted’s life, and it wasn’t finished either, it seems to me, but there was so much more done and so much more time lived.

Fentress: Well, he was ever aware that he had the blessings of years that his brothers didn’t enjoy, and he felt that every day.

Young: That’s right, but his work was unfinished, in a sense.

Fentress: One of the tragedies is for him, the last year, to not be in the fray on healthcare. How frustrating. But everybody knew where he was, and they knew what that Health Committee did. His voice was heard and will be heard on it, as we evolve.

Young: Yes. His name will always be prominent on the thing when it’s done. He did concentrate on that. He gave up his Judiciary Committee. He had to do everything with the Senate from a distance. He couldn’t be there but he was still working it, still trying to do it. And then there was the book that he wanted to do. That assumed, it seems to me, top priority, when you look at the choices he made about how to spend his final days.
**Fentress:** Let me say how hard he worked. You cannot overestimate Vicki’s role, first of all, in the last 17 years of his life. And ever so much in the last two years of his life. But listen, it became ever apparent to me, being with them together, that there wasn’t a single issue that came across the plate that he didn’t solicit, enjoy, and take counsel of her opinion, on any issue. He had absolute confidence in her judgment, and was obviously, totally, in love. It changed his life.

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** The respect and love was so apparent. If you look at the efforts on the oral histories that you well know—Her major role in that, and certainly in the book, as things got more difficult in the last year, was incalculable. You can’t overestimate her role and how important she was, and will be, in the legacy of what he had done.

**Young:** That was just extraordinary.

**Fentress:** You know, the Senator was one of the great storytellers of our time. Vicki is ever his equal, and on certain accents, his superior. She is marvelous. He would often get two or three sentences into a story and he would stop and say, “Vicki, you tell this.” Knowing him, the restraint he exercised on that, saying to himself, “She can do a better job at the story than I can.” And it’s so true. She just was the joy of his life.

**Young:** It was a real love story. She was a partner. It was wonderful, the glimpses I could get of the fun they had together. The nature of the connection between the two was really quite extraordinary. That part of his life finally entered a time of gloriousness.

**Fentress:** The Senator’s sense of history and students and young people is really carried on, as the plans have been made for his Institute. It’s going to be a learning center.

**Young:** Yes.

**Fentress:** It’s going to be an educational destination for students, historians, teachers, the public, certainly the public. He wants everyone involved. It’s at UMass, which is the perfect place, with the university, with the students from working class backgrounds. It’s important. You know, the first architectural rendering we saw was this massive, grand building. “No, no. I want something simple. We want something smaller, less ornate, and we want to use every inch of our space. We don’t want wasted space. We don’t want a memorial”—all of those things.

So it’s going to be a learning center. It’s going to be important and it’s going to really be a part of the United States Senate. Somebody said long ago that the Senate, in the Founding Fathers’ eyes, is really the engine room of the democracy, and so hopefully, we’ll be able to carry on a sense of the historical importance of the Senate—a place he so much believed in and dedicated his life to.

**Young:** That’s right, and so it’s caring for the future generations as he’s cared for his own generation. I came to see these oral histories that we do as basically an enduring project of public education, so that the experiences and the knowledge that don’t get written into books, or written down in papers, can be communicated directly to the next generation, and to generations after that, which means you learn from what I’ve learned, or learn from what I did and failed to do,
and learn about how it was done. I can understand the sense the Kennedy Institute makes, because that’s what it’s doing. I just thought it was a marvelous idea when I heard about it, that it’s not a mausoleum for papers.

**Fentress:** It sort of evolved when the Senator was in his 40th year, trying to figure out what to do with those papers, commemoration of what he would do. Ed Schlossberg played a role in establishing this vision.

I must say, Jim, these histories wouldn’t be taking place were it not for you, my friend. Early on in this process, everybody sensed, when the decision was made to come to the University of Virginia and the Miller Center, it was in very large part because of your professionalism and your real sense of history, and that’s to a large part why we’re here. Our choice has been reinforced every day.

**Young:** Well, that’s wonderful to hear. It’s really the last and best project in my life. It’s an incomparable experience, to have this opportunity and to get to know somebody by doing oral history with them. It was just an amazing experience for me. I wrote to Vicki once that this project has always been uppermost in my mind, in my work, but now it’s also in my heart. You can’t avoid that. The more you know, and the more you get to know the real people, the more impressed you are.

**Fentress:** It’s hard to keep your distance, it really is.

**Young:** Yes, but for me it’s the first time—it’s important to pretend to be the historian of the future. You’ve got to ask what people—

**Fentress:** But you have in every sense.

**Young:** But then for that professional inquiry. It worked in the first instance because he was interested in history, and I knew something about it too, and was also interested in the future of this. You don’t get into oral history unless you’re concerned about the future.

**Fentress:** Right.

**Young:** You’re not in it to write your own books. But in the second instance, because we became friends in this process, and this is something that just doesn’t happen.

**Fentress:** Without question. I got three or four phone calls at the end of different interviews, from Vicki and the Senator, saying, “We just finished with Jim and it was wonderful. Here’s what we covered.” I would be in a car somewhere driving, and I’d just get this call right out of the blue. I think Teddy would say, “Let’s call. I want to share this.”

First of all, I was obviously flattered, but the point was that they enjoyed it and it was a wonderful experience. They felt they were doing something very important. And that was, in large part, the way they were conducted, obviously, and the tenor and the trust. That can’t be overemphasized.
Young: I sense that, and I feel really blessed to have a professional endeavor, which I’ve dedicated a lot of my life to, but in this last project of mine, to have it turn into something so extraordinary, and to really be able to see and perceive and be a friend of Ted Kennedy—Words just fail me. The personal and the professional experience, together, is just something most academicians never experience.

Fentress: Right. Well, that’s the nice thing about oral histories.

Young: It is.

Fentress: And how wonderful this is, that we’re not going to have to be chasing letters and those dictated remarks, that you have his words and you have all of his contemporaries’ words on a nonpartisan basis. It’s wonderful.

Young: Well, it’s meant a lot to me. I told Vicki that I feel doubly blessed. I was a stranger who got to know him just by doing oral history with him and who at some point became a friend. That’s a double blessing, and I don’t think this would have happened if it hadn’t been for you.

Fentress: Well, I don’t know.

Young: You and Vicki were the movers here.

Fentress: I had lunch with him. We were sitting up in Maine, talking, and he said, “Lee, what are you doing? What do you want to do?” And I said, “I don’t know. I’d like to be doing something,” because I’d throttled back from my firm. He said, “I’ve got some ideas. Why don’t you think about applying for the job as the president of the JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] Library?” I said, “Well, I don’t think—No, I don’t see that. I don’t think I’m qualified. I don’t have enough—I didn’t know the President.”

The next thing I know, we’re in Washington having lunch alone on a Friday afternoon. I meet him at a restaurant there. Of course, I get lost and he’s sitting there waiting for me for 15 minutes, and I know that being late, for him, is verboten.

He was very nice. He outlined a broad concept of doing an extensive oral history that would take several years. I remember driving home thinking, What’s he asked me to do? It turned out that he had asked me to take over the project, to interview the different entities doing oral histories, and make a recommendation of how to proceed.

Young: Yes.

Fentress: So that we did. We went around and looked at all of them, and saw presentations from each of the institutions. It became clear that the Miller Center and the University of Virginia had a different approach to oral histories, much more elaborate, but it was clearly—it was an art, and it was a science. They had taken it to higher levels than the other groups, and most importantly, we began to sense the real interest that you had in the project, and felt very early on that everybody wanted to work with you and we could trust you. I wrote a long memo to both the Senator and Vicki, giving the strong points about each, and finally, with a recommendation. We were all unanimous. Then we had a couple of trips down here to talk about proceeding.
Young: Oh, I remember you visited and then you said, “Let me have Vicki come out.” I remember sitting around that little table. I hadn’t made a study of Kennedy in particular, and I said, “I just think of him as a self-made man. That’s just my image of him when I think about him.” He was born a Kennedy, he was this, and he was all those things, but he was, above all, a person who made something of himself, who had made what he is.

Fentress: I think Senator Byrd was amazed with him in that relationship. I mean, Byrd saw this young guy coming in, noblesse oblige, every gift, brother of the President, prep schools and so forth, and thought to himself, almost with disdain. *If I could find a person who is so different from me*, but began to realize how much alike they were, from what you just said: how hard they worked, how much they loved the institution, and how they made themselves what they were.

Young: Yes, Byrd recognized that, I think, but boy, in his interview, he talked about how they started out, and he said it more than once.

Fentress: You knew how he felt—Well, good.

Young: He just let him have it with both barrels. And then, once Byrd—

Fentress: I saw Senator Byrd the other day on the steps of the Capitol, when we drove by, in the funeral procession there. He was sitting in a chair there. It was a very sad moment, seeing him there. He sat out there for a couple of hours, waiting for the motorcade, and we were all thinking, *It’s late. He’s not going to like this.*

But the crowds, Jim, going from the church in Boston out to Hanscom Field, on a dreadful day, buckets of rain, cold—the crowds, four and five deep, all the way out to the airport; likewise, from Andrews into the city, past the Capitol and on to Arlington. It was, obviously, an unbelievable funeral, but that was the most poignant thing, perhaps, to me—just the outpouring of people along the entire route who didn’t know him.

Young: It was very powerful. It was very powerful all along. Are we finished?

Fentress: We are. Thank you, Jim.

Young: Thank you.