

**Marietta Tree Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 11/10/71**  
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**Biographical Note**

Tree, New York political figure; member, Democratic Advisory Committee (1956-1960); member, New York Citizens for Kennedy (1960); delegate to the Human Rights Commission, United Nations (1961-1967), discusses her work at the United Nations, and her decision to support Robert F. Kennedy for president, among other issues.

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Marietta Tree – JFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

with

MARIETTA TREE

November 10, 1971  
New York, New York

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Now you say you have a story that you call the Daw Mya Sein story, about women's rights and John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] and so on. Would you tell it to us please?

TREE: When I was U.S. representative to the Human Rights Commission and the U.S. delegate to the General Assembly [General Assembly of the United Nations] of the fall of 1963, I had the honor and opportunity of taking all the women delegates of the United Nations for a day's trip to Washington. We flew down and back. It was a beautiful autumn day, and all the ladies, including the Soviet ladies for whom we had to get special permission to leave the United Nations, seemed to be enjoying it very much.

President Kennedy received us in the Rose Garden of the White House. We nominated as our spokesman Daw Mya Sein, who'd been an official at the League of Nations on the women's rights committee and now was a delegate from Burma to the Third Committee [Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee] of the General Assembly. She looked like an almond and was a most delightful, wise woman whom we all liked. Daw Mya Sein stepped forward at the head of our group and said to Kennedy, "Thank you very much, Mr. President, for receiving us here today. And I hope in a few years' time that a woman president will be standing just where you are now, welcoming the men delegates to the United Nations." Kennedy didn't bat an eye. He said, "Madam, you are raising the standard of rebellion in the royal pavilion."

So, afterwards I asked him where he got that quotation. It was so perfectly apt and came out so quickly. He couldn't remember, I'm sorry to say.

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MOSS: No. What could you say about his attitude towards women in general? This is an area of puzzlement to those of us who are studying him. You mentioned in your first interview that he did not seem to understand how to relate to women politicians. We find very few women really active in the Kennedy political entourage. What's your view of it?

TREE: I think he had rather an old-fashioned view towards women. And of course here I accept any description of relationship with his wife Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], because, of course, I don't know anything about it. But I had the feeling, before he was president, that he viewed women, especially pretty women, as objects. I think he enjoyed them and was extremely interested in them, but I felt all along that he didn't view himself as a friend or companion of women. And, of course, there've been many stories about his being suddenly struck by a woman's charms and being very direct with her: wanting to leave a party, where he met somebody who was beautiful, right away and go off and see her more. He was very direct, and aggressive. I felt that although for the most part, women were a necessary adjunct to his life, he simply enjoyed their beauty and charms without particularly their intellectual or...

MOSS: Their counsel?

TREE: Or their counsel. Their intellectual side or their counsel.

MOSS: Yes. You were mentioning the fact that you took the women delegates to the United Nations down to Washington. I noted that in the *New York Times* also that you entertained the Empress of Iran [Farah Diba Pahlavi] when she came.

TREE: Yes.

MOSS: Do you have any stories connected with that?

TREE: Well, from time to time, I was asked by the State Department to entertain various prominent women who came from abroad, and the Empress of Iran, was one. We were all a little bit nervous about her coming, as we didn't know if she spoke English, if she'd be stiff like most royalty, and...But this all turned out to be needless apprehension, because she is an absolute delight. Very easy, very cozy, extremely intelligent,

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and had been a student abroad a good deal of her life. Therefore she was very much at ease with people of all ages, and very much at ease in the world. She was beautiful and gay, very giggly and responsive, and I think that she must make a great difference to the Shah [Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi].

MOSS:           The Shah.

TREE:           To his life. Because she is obviously not corrupted by the world, as so much of his court is, and is so totally devoted to his well-being, and to his aims for modernizing Iran. One feels that she is an extremely deep person with a very well developed sense of values, and must act as a shield in many ways, both as far as values are concerned, and as far as court gossip and the pettiness that so often arises in the monarchy when there is no parliament, or no real parliament, I should say, because of course we do know there is an Iranian Parliament. Many of my women friends are members of it.

Another time we entertained Indira Gandhi here at lunch. She came over one fall with her father, Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru], and the word came up from Washington that she hadn't smiled once on this trip. No matter what they did. Whatever delightful young senator or congressman they'd put her next to, or attractive man of wisdom and experience from the State Department, she remained adamantly anti-American and bitter, making wobbly and fuzzy leftist remarks about the United States. She evidently deeply hated us—and hate was literally the word. I don't feel that her father felt this way, but if he felt negatively towards the United States he managed to conceal it.

MOSS:           More the Krishna Menon [Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon] kind of thing.

TREE:           It was. Hers was really a straight Krishna Menon kind of line, but spoken without the charm or the humor of Menon. So they telephoned us from the State Department and said, "Do your best with her. We've given up. Not even Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] can make her smile."

MOSS:           Who would have been calling Angie Duke [Angier Biddle Duke], or...

TREE:           I think it was probably Harriman to Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. So Stevenson was quite nervous about her arrival, and as you know, he's a famous charmer. So when she arrived, he turned it on with all

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taps, but this had no effect. And then at various meals we saw that she sat next to extremely bright young ambassadors, for instance, the Swedish ambassador, who might share her liberal views on mankind and how it should be organized. But nothing shattered her implacable expression of dislike. Finally I was asked to have her for lunch, and I also was very nervous, hoping that it wouldn't be an international disaster. So I asked to the lunch

women politicians in New York City of both parties: from Brooklyn, the Bronx, all over. And she arrived looking very grim, her hair beautifully done, very well dressed, and answered all questions addressed to her monosyllabically.

When we sat down to lunch, I remembered that she was the head of Congress Party [Indian National Congress]. And so, after we'd had the first course, I got up and welcomed her to our midst and said, "Mrs. Gandhi, these ladies here are women politicians; they are of both parties in this city; they are extremely interested in organization. Probably you are aware that the women in this country do most of the political work, and are deeply concerned with the political organizations. We are not allowed in much on policy matters as yet, but we are winning our way by working, doing the drudgery of sealing the envelopes, addressing the envelopes, canvassing, which is by far the most interesting part of politics at any level, making the posters, raising the money, etc. And we are extremely interested to meet a woman politician who has actually made it; who is the head of your huge part in India."

Suddenly her face melted. She smiled, she got up, and she talked for two hours on the organization of the Congress Party in the most delightful and fascinating way, and held us spellbound. And I know that she had a very good time or she wouldn't have spoken at such length, and responded eagerly and keenly to our questions. So I was terribly pleased that, at least once in the United States, we'd been able to see Mrs. Gandhi's warmth and energy revealed, as well as her great intelligence.

MOSS: Yes. This leads in two directions now, one to the business of campaigning and the other on the whole matter of entertaining and the UN. Many people have remarked that a great deal of the UN work gets done at cocktail parties and so on. I'd like to have from you a kind of description of, or anecdotal references to the kinds of things that you found were done at cocktail parties during the Kennedy administration.

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TREE: Well, when I was first nominated to the Human Rights Commission, I went to my great predecessor, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt], for advice. She made two points which had a great influence on my approach to my job. She said, "First and foremost, master the intellectual side of your job. Know exactly what happened before. Learn the language of the documents. As you know, the language of the UN, although it is in English, has quite a different meaning than one would suppose. In other words, she said, "do your homework."

And so for the first month that I was at the United Nations I was up until one and two in the morning with my adviser, trying to understand and to master the history of all these issues—in short, to do my homework. In fact, I was so nervous that my adviser would leave me, and that I would be exposed—that my total ignorance would be exposed—I used to stand outside of the men's room of the United Nations while the poor fellow went in. I was so afraid he'd get away from me. [Laughter]

Her second piece of advice was, "Get to know your fellow delegates well. Know about their families, what their intellectual background has been, and their attitudes towards politics in their own country and at the United Nations." She said that, as we have to know in

advance for the State Department how the votes will go in a committee on most important issues, it's well to get to know a few key people in different parts of the world who, for reasons of prestige or because they come from a large country, are the leaders in their region or know accurately how the votes will go in their region. In other words, get a kind of shorthand acquaintance with key figures in your committee so that you can quickly find out how a vote will go so you can inform the State Department; also how you can test ideas that the State Department wants put forward to them before you actually express them in the public forum.

These were two excellent pieces of advice. She said, "The way you get to know people on a shorthand basis—or rather the best way—is to have five or six people for a meal at your home. They rarely get inside people's homes—the UN delegates—and that means a great deal to them." So again, I followed her advice and invited people to my home in groups of five, six, ten, sometimes as many as twenty. She was absolutely right. People responded warmly and gratefully to these invitations—this to a solitary meal—I was terribly grateful to her for this. And it paid off, not only in accurate information about what was going to happen politically in a variety of ways at the UN, but also in the greatest pleasure for me. I made warm

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friends all over the globe, and I continue to see them when I travel. I feel in a way as if I'd been at school with them, because, as you know, we lived all day and most nights together, certainly during the General Assembly and of course during the work of the smaller committees during the rest of the year.

Of course I always asked the Soviet delegates or the Ukrainian delegates, but never alone, because I knew that they would never accept an invitation alone. I generally asked the delegate and his adviser, or two or three of the delegates together. At that time they were obviously told not to drink: so even the best Russian vodka was refused by them. But nonetheless, they also responded warmly to gestures of friendship, and I made several really good friends amongst the Soviets—especially a woman called Mrs. Kastelskaya who was a regular foreign service civil servant. One year she told me....Shall I go on these kind of rambling stories?

MOSS:            Surely.

TREE:            One year she told me she was terribly distressed about her daughter, age seventeen, because she seemed terribly irresponsible, she wouldn't tell her anything. She sounded to me like a seventeen year old daughter in any country, especially in the United States. The following year I saw her, asked about her daughter, and she said, "The most terrible thing has happened. She married, and she married an uncultured man." I said, "Oh, Mrs. Kastelskaya!" She said, "It's really humiliating to take her husband around to see our friends in Moscow because he's so uncultured." In an effort to assuage her remorse over her daughter's behavior, I said, "Well, in the United States it's perfectly common for girls who come from cultivated households to marry young men who have to start from the bottom. Very often friends of mine have married young men who were

ditch-diggers or waiters, and they've worked while their husband went to school to get further education, and supported the family; it's very common. So I wouldn't worry about your son-in-law. I'm sure, if he's got the taste to marry your daughter that he's a wonderful young man and you'll be proud of him." I said, "Incidentally, what does he do?" She said, "He's the first violinist in the symphony orchestra in Kiev." I said "You call him uncultured?" She said, "He certainly is. He's got the most terrible Russian accent; you see, he normally speaks Ukrainian."

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MOSS: Do you recall any situations where there was a need for a resolution of a point at issue—on the commission, in the third committee, in any of the committees of the commission—where the social event was the forum for the resolution?

TREE: I think this happened in a number of small ways all the time. I can't remember any specific one.

MOSS: Nothing dramatic at all.

TREE: Nothing dramatic. I was soon taught by my adviser that when I went to a cocktail party this ought to be the opportunity to ask a number of delegates to, let's say, co-author a resolution with the United States. And of course, being a woman and unused to going up to men to engage them in conversation, I was a bit shy and reluctant at first; especially for instance when the Venezuelan delegate was talking to a ravishing redhead in the corner. But I soon learned that all the delegates expected to be advanced on and talked to in this manner, and in fact, that was the purpose of the occasion. And also that they did not resent returning to the world's work from the redhead, so to speak.

Mrs. Roosevelt was wonderful to me. Not only with her advice and counsel and concern, but she often would come to the UN while the Human Rights Commission was going on and sit behind me, and I can assure you she gave a great aura to my mission there. The delegates looked at me with quite different eyes when she laid her hand on my shoulder; I was so grateful to her for that. She also gave for me a series of lunches at her apartment in New York, inviting various delegates on the committees that she and I worked on. They were wonderful lunches that only she could have given. Very American food, blueberry muffins and corn pudding; and Indian pudding for dessert. I don't know if you've ever had that in New England.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: She would wear the most marvelous necklace of tiger's teeth mounted in gold, which only a Roosevelt woman would have worn. But again it was deeply impressive to the other delegates, especially the African delegates. However, she was always very disappointed when the African

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women delegates did not show up for these lunches, when they had accepted. One day she asked an African woman delegate why two of her sister delegates had not come to lunch when they had said that very morning they would come. The delegate from Dahomey said, “Well, I don’t think you understand, Mrs. Roosevelt, that in our countries people don’t necessarily go to a social occasion when they’ve accepted. And sometimes when they’ve refused, they might arrive all the same, not only bringing their husbands, but perhaps five or ten other relations.” Mrs. Roosevelt’s reaction was typical. She said, “Well, how is there enough food?” And the delegate replied, “Well, there’s always enough food for five or a hundred when we give a party.” And Mrs. Roosevelt said, “How very wasteful.”

MOSS:               What do you recall of Mrs. Roosevelt’s feelings, attitudes towards the developing Kennedy administration?

TREE:               As you know, Mrs. Roosevelt was a strong Stevenson supporter and was bitterly disappointed in the Convention [Democratic National Convention] of 1960—the nominating convention—that Stevenson was not nominated. She had come all the way out to California, breaking up a European tour in order to come and help him. But she came too late. It’s fair to say that she also had been working in a quiet way behind the scenes during the weeks before, for Stevenson’s candidacy, and was mystified by Stevenson’s ambivalent attitude towards being nominated, and towards this group that was working for him behind the scenes.

MOSS:               As an aside, do you have any insight into that ambivalence?

TREE:               Yes, a certain amount of insight. Naturally I can’t know everything. But I think that he, although he never expressed it, was terrified of losing for a third time. I think that he had been so exhausted physically, and spiritually too, by the primaries of 1956 and 1955 that he didn’t feel he could go through it all again—I mean by that another campaign. I don’t know why campaigning was so difficult for him, why he hated it so much. But I think he hated being manipulated. He was always feeling rushed when it came to making statements or making speeches, and felt...I remember his saying to a governor of Delaware, former governor of Delaware, Carvel [Elbert N. Carvel] once, “Frank, I don’t see why you like campaigning as much as

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you seem to. I loath it more than anything in politics. Why do you like it so much?” And Carvel said, “I adore campaigning. I love the electricity of crowds and the touch of lots of people. I love talking to crowds and getting their response. In fact, every day of campaigning is like Christmas to me.” “Well,” said Stevenson, “why aren’t you running for office this year?” And Carvel said, “Oh, I might get elected.”

MOSS:               Back to Mrs. Roosevelt.

TREE: Back to Mrs. Roosevelt. I think she viewed Jack Kennedy with some suspicion. She, of course, hated his father and felt that he, Jack Kennedy, might be tarred by his father's brush. I think she felt that Jack had got where he had, not by hard work, virtue, or identification with issues such as civil rights that meant so much to her, but through kind of a meretricious charm and money. And there were many other politicians that she would have preferred to see nominated ahead of Jack, I'm sure. Of course, she did not know him very well at that time. And, of course Jack would have been very ill at ease with a woman like Mrs. Roosevelt, for all the reasons we talked about earlier.

So, I think that when he was elected she continued to view him ambivalently. Naturally she was happy that a Democrat had been elected. And she had great respect for any Democrat that might be president because of the office of the president. But when he began to make, what in her view were great mistakes in foreign policy, such as the Bay of Pigs, and when there appeared to be kind of an aura of a court around the White House, then she was also disturbed. But I think that she did her genuine very best to see the effective side of Kennedy, and the fact that he was a young man who was learning, in her terms, very fast and becoming more and more of a solid figure.

MOSS: Let me ask you about the question of the Stevenson candidacy for Secretary of State. Did you get involved in pushing him for the job at all?

TREE: No, I didn't get involved in pushing him for the job. Bill Blair [William McCormick Blair, Jr.] told me that Kennedy had come to see Stevenson at his farm in Illinois sometime in the winter of 1960.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: And had asked him then for his support.

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MOSS: Yes.

TREE: Because Stevenson had announced publicly after the defeat in '56 that he would not back anybody and would not run himself in 1960, he did not give him his support. Bill Blair said at that moment he lost the Secretary of State job. But of course Stevenson didn't recognize this, or admit it, because he wanted the job so badly. And he always hoped against hope, after the nomination and during the campaign, that if he campaigned very hard for Kennedy, especially in the states such as New York and California where he had considerable following, that Kennedy would reward him with this job. But, obviously Kennedy was determined that he would not be Secretary of State, perhaps for the foregoing reasons. Plus, I assume, that he wanted to be his own Secretary of State, just as Johnson did later, and besides he did not want to put a powerful figure who might overrule him on certain issues or would have a popular following to put against the President, should there be an overt split between them on any issue.

I think, when Stevenson was finally nominated as ambassador to the United Nations, that he really behaved quite badly about the whole matter; and perhaps, if you will, typically. He was unable to suppress his bitterness, and talked to everybody about it whether he knew them well or not, and kept saying after he was offered the job at the United Nations, that it was a second-rate job and he didn't think he'd take it. But, as we all knew he was going to take it in the end, we thought it was rather poor to put it down, stupid politically as well. Well, he took it, as you know. And in the following three years there was a good deal of friction between Stevenson and Kennedy on foreign policy issues. Of course, being forced unknowingly to tell a lie at the United Nations about the spy plane which was discovered by Castro [Fidel Castro] made Stevenson terribly bitter towards Kennedy. And he was increasingly embittered and perhaps even a bit frightened when, subsequently, an article appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* by Stewart Alsop and Charlie Bartlett [Charles Bartlett], making Stevenson out to be an appeaser, soft on communism, soft on all issues, as compared to this hard-nosed, pragmatic group at the White House. As Chet Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] had bit the dust at the State Department a few months previously, I assume that Stevenson feared that he would be forced out and this article was perhaps the bellwether of it.

Now Clayton Fritchey, who was his press officer at the United Nations and a great friend of mine, and I urged him to fight

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back and to bring it out in the open, which could embarrass Kennedy. So we got him to answer all the charges, issue press releases on these matters to say that he had not been soft when he had been accused of this, and to go on the "Today Show" about this article refuting the various points. There weren't very many hard points in it, but he refuted the fuzzy accusations of softness and his willingness to bargain away our bases in other countries in order to appease the Russians on Cuba or even....I guess we're talking about another period.

MOSS: Yes, that was with the Missile Crisis.

TREE: Yes, about the Missile Crisis. But I might as well finish this story because it's typical of the relations between the White House and Stevenson. Well, Stevenson had many friends in the press. And I remember John Steele of *Time* wrote a very stirring editorial defending Stevenson, and various others came to his support. So finally Kennedy called up—the President, I should say—called up Clayton one day (Clayton was also a great friend of his) and said, "All right, cease fire. We'll both put down our arms." So Stevenson's job was saved. As opposed to Chet Bowles' who didn't fight for himself.

MOSS: Yes. Let me ask you further about the whole relationship between New York and Washington. You have down there the President, and Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy], and Harlan Cleveland [Harlan J. Cleveland], and Rusk [Dean Rusk] and so on and Kotschnig [Walter M. Kotschnig] and the staff up here \at the UN Mission. What was that relationship?

TREE: Well, as inevitably happens, the Mission always considers Washington to be badly informed, to make hasty decisions that would actually hurt our position enormously—not just at the UN but throughout the world—and this, I suppose will continue as long as the two exist. Stevenson made a great effort to go to Washington at least once a week, to go to policy decision meetings, and to keep in touch generally. But, when things got hot at the United Nations it was hard for him to do, although he was on the telephone to Harlan Cleveland many times a day, and to the President. He did feel that he had an easy access to the President. He knew that the President was very much involved in the United Nations and in supporting it as an institution, contrary to Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] or Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. But when a policy decision is made in the White House President's office, very often the ambassador to the UN simply cannot be there because he must be in the Security Council [United Nations Security Council]. And, even though the telephone is possible for communications, still it's not the same as being there physically.

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I remember at Stevenson's funeral, Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] (who I was very surprised to see there at all because he was not particularly a friend of Stevenson's) said to me, "Why is it that Stevenson had no effect on policy?" This rather enraged me because I think that Adlai did have at least a certain amount of effect on policy. And I said, "Because of the geography of the situation. You cannot be in two places at once. You cannot be where the policy is being made because you have other obligations." "Well," he said "any ambassador to the United Nations ought to go down to Washington a great deal and ought to have the ear of the President." I said, "He had the ear of the President and he went down to Washington a great deal. But he simply cannot be in two places at the same time." Well, Arthur looked very unconvinced by my statement, and later he learned, to his sorrow, that you cannot be in two places at once.

MOSS: Yes, I expect he appreciates the thrust of that a little more now.

TREE: I think he does.

MOSS: Let me ask you about the Mission itself, two questions really. How was it organized and how were the job functions portioned out, how did they overlap? And the other question is one about the, sort of the closed nature of the UN. It's a world of its own with its own momentum, its own demands and requirements, that sometimes—just as Washington has its own that doesn't take into account the UN—the UN has its own momentum that doesn't take into account Washington.

TREE: Yes, that's absolutely true. Well, the U.S. Mission to the UN was run vertically. I mean by that that although we met once or twice a week—the whole Mission—to be informed about policy matters or perhaps even to debate a policy matter or two, actually Stevenson was communicating with his opposite numbers like Harlan Cleveland or Dean Rusk. I was communicating with my opposite

numbers in the State Department, or the people who had to give me my instructions. Charlie Yost [Charles W. Yost] was doing the same at his level. And so it went. In other words, Stevenson did not give me my orders at all. And he actually rarely, if ever, discussed an issue on one of my committees with me, because he was so involved with issues on his committees.

MOSS: Let me ask you as an aside about the support that you got from the State Department and this sort of thing. The opposite number down...

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TREE: Well the support was first class. I was tremendously impressed by the people with whom I worked at the State Department, starting with Harlan Cleveland, Dick Gardner [Richard Newton Gardner], who was his deputy; Joe Sisco [Joseph John Sisco] was another one of his brilliant deputies; and, of course, the human rights group at the State Department were all good, extremely well informed, and devoted to their jobs and to the human rights issues—very concerned, fervent, you might call them. They came up to New York from time to time, and we became fast friends and have remained ever since. From my experience I do think the State Department is grossly maligned. In those years I met many State Department people in Washington and on my travels, because as you know I was sent to various parts of the globe every year for two or three months to lecture and, therefore, I met a great many of them out in the field. I rarely, if ever, have met a State Department or a foreign service officer that I didn't admire and who was not extremely competent, and working against the most terrible odds. I also think they happen to marry awfully well. Their wives are true partners in their work and deeply concerned with the countries that they're sent to, and trying to help their husbands and the image of the United States. They all seemed concerned with the social issues, and the development of the country that they're sent to also.

MOSS: Back to the UN Mission itself and the division. You said that it was vertical. What areas were there of overlap? Would you and Plimpton [Francis Taylor Pearson Plimpton], for instance, have an overlap in any part...

TREE: I had no overlap with anybody, except that I started out in life working under Philip Klutznick [Philip M. Klutznick] who was the Economic and Social Council representative, and the Human Rights Commission, of course, stemmed from the Economic and Social Council. Therefore, when I went to Geneva especially, every day we would meet with the boss, the United States representative to the Economic and Social Council who was Philip Klutznick first, then became Jack Bingham [Johnathan Brewster Bingham], then became Franklin Williams [Franklin H. Williams]. But when I moved to the Fourth Committee [United Nations Trusteeship Committee] and the Committee of Twenty-Four, I was my own boss at the U.S. Mission, that is.

MOSS: All right. Let me ask you briefly about the two visits that President Kennedy made to the UN, speaking before the General Assembly, September 1961 and September 1963. Do you recall any things of that?

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TREE: Yes, I recall very well. Kennedy came and made a really remarkable speech the first time, putting forward six points that he thought the General Assembly should enact, concerning disarmament, a development decade, and various other really important issues. He impressed the General Assembly deeply, and to the extent that they actually enacted all six of his points at that General Assembly, which I think, is a great tribute to him and to the points or ideas themselves. The “Decade of Development,” of course, was rather a sad failure, but it got off to an awfully good start under Kennedy because of his great support for the UN and for the economic development of the developing countries. I remember he came that day with Jackie and a bunch of jet set friends who looked very out-of-place in the United Nations assembly hall. Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], who was the White House liaison between the President and Stevenson, on one of those occasions told me that he had hoped that Kennedy would put an offer to the Soviet Union to go to the moon jointly and that he had been terribly excited because everybody in the State Department—and I assume that Bundy and company also were against it—but Kennedy had seized on this idea and had put it into his speech. Perhaps that was the second speech. But, alas, the Soviets did not grab his offer, as Bevin [Ernest Bevin] had grabbed The Marshall Plan offer years before.

MOSS: I have heard Mike Forrestal [Michael V. Forrestal] described as the White House ambassador to that independent sovereignty, Averell Harriman. Now, would you describe Arthur Schlesinger’s role the same way, vis-à-vis Stevenson?

TREE: Yes, I think this is another example of the President’s tact and sympathy with Stevenson. I think that he, on the whole, was much nicer to Stevenson than vice-versa. He knew that Arthur was somebody that Stevenson liked enormously, was even intimate with, and he knew that Arthur would represent him well to the President. Therefore, Arthur spent a great deal of time on the phone between the two of them trying to translate one to the other.

MOSS: Of course the second Kennedy speech at the UN talked of the smoldering coals of war in Southeast Asia. Do you recall anything of the reception of the delegates to this now ominous-sounding phrase?

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TREE: No, I don’t. I don’t. I remember that year that I was on the Fourth Committee, which has to do with the remaining problems of the non-self-governing territories, i.e. colonial territories. As usual, some of the

Africans were shouting in the committee about our sending arms to Portugal—a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] nation—and that these same arms were used against their brothers in Angola and Mozambique. I remember one of the delegates saying, “President Kennedy’s hands are red with the blood of our brothers,” and I remember how shocked I was at anybody saying such a thing publicly. It really shook me deeply. I was relieved that this was not printed in the papers, because somehow or other I thought that it would hurt the prestige of the UN with the Administration.

MOSS: How did you find the State Department on the Portugal Angola issue? The conventional wisdom has the new African group fighting against the old Europeanist group in the State Department. How did you see it?

TREE: Thanks to Stevenson’s views and sympathy with black Africa, and with a first-class man in charge of the Africa desk at the State Department...

MOSS: Wayne Fredericks [Wayne J. Fredericks].

TREE: Wayne Fredericks. The United States became more interested in Africa and we sent first-class young ambassadors to these black African countries. I think our African policy attitudes were very good indeed, as they were more sympathetic to black Africa, and I was very proud of our stance—a great change from the previous administration.

MOSS: Do you recall anything of the UN mission attitude and so on with the Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] coup in Vietnam in the first of November, 1963?

TREE: No, I’m ashamed to say I can’t remember anything.

MOSS: What about some of the other issues. Well, let’s take for instance the change-over from Hammarskjöld [Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld] to U Thant. Of course you have the tragic circumstances of Hammarskjöld’s death, and the choice of U Thant and so on. How did the UN mission respond to this?

TREE: Well, there was a noticeable change in style, mood and content of the work of the Secretary General between Hammarskjöld and U Thant. Hammarskjöld, as you know, was an activist, and we very much backed the policy of trying to keep the status quo in the Congo, and thereby keep

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The Soviets out of the heartland of Africa. For this, as you know, Hammarskjöld fell afoul of the Russians. And I think they would have got him out one way or another, even if he’d lived. U Thant, realizing the state of real affairs—that he mustn’t challenge the Soviets—became a great deal more passive, in the Congo and elsewhere. He also is probably the

world's worst administrator. I was on his staff, subsequently, for two years, and could see it closer to. So the effect and power of the Secretariat diminished greatly during his term of office.

MOSS: Let me come back to something on the Human Rights Commission thing for a moment. I have a note here that I was curious as to your feelings as to whether there was a dichotomy or not between the practical matters of politicking, a wording in the covenants and so on, and the emotionally broad issues of racial and religious intolerance and that sort of thing. [Interruption]

TREE: I think that was terribly well expressed by the *Times* this morning.

MOSS: I might say for the record that we're referring to a *New York Times* article of this date.

TREE: Yes. That we in the United States are doers rather than philosophers and, at the time that I was a member of the Human Rights Commission, there were still, and remain today of course, tremendous civil rights problems. Although laws were being passed one after another in Congress to give blacks a better deal in this country, still the discriminations were very apparent, as they are today. United Nations Africans in New York were often discriminated against as American blacks, and they felt very bitterly about this.

Well, whenever the Soviet Union attacked the United States and the Human Rights Commission on civil rights and brought up denial of rights in Alabama, directly following, I would attack the position of Jews in the Soviet Union. I became rather an expert on the plight of Soviet Jews. I could rattle off a hundred statistics such as there was only one small rabbinical school in Moscow and nowhere else in the country, about the Jews being unable to back matzo bread, that the last Jewish prayer books, if that's what they're called, had been printed before the revolution, etc., etc. So it became an almost hieratic dance between the Soviets and ourselves on Alabama and the Soviet Jews. But I desperately wanted the United States to appear to be as good as she is, or was. And I remember feeling terribly unhappy

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about the things that were said about the United States at the United Nations, because much worse things were happening in many of the countries of delegates who were slanging us on human rights. All these injustices and unfairnesses struck home to me because I so desperately wanted our country to be understood, and understood to be concerned about the injustices without our borders, and the fact that we are trying to right these wrongs, and what's more succeeding, as compared to so many closed societies represented at the UN. I remember at one time—I nearly got fired for it too—we were discussing a convention on religious discrimination. And after a non-governmental organization representative made a stirring speech that anti-Semitism should be put into this convention since it is one of the terrible scourges of religious discrimination, I sent my adviser quickly to phone the State Department to ask if I could put the word anti-Semitism on the list of things that should be

eliminated. He couldn't get anybody in Washington, everybody was out to lunch. So I thought—to protect myself—that perhaps I could get the Canadian delegate to come with me and sponsor this sub-amendment about anti-Semitism. He replied that he had no instructions. So, I stood up, and on my own initiative for the first time put in the word “anti-Semitism.”

Well, the next day, Dick Gardner, who was then deputy assistant Secretary of State, came up to Washington especially to see me and said, “If you do a thing like this again, uninstructed, you'll be fired”—or words to that effect.

MOSS: Came up to New York.

TREE: Yes. To tell me this.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: He alarmed me quite a lot, until ten days later I noticed on the front page—this was when Johnson was president—Johnson saying, “As I instructed my delegate at the United Nations to say, anti-Semitism is the scourge of the world and should be included in the number of things that should be eliminated.” And ten days after that, again on the front page, I saw Dean Rusk quoted as saying, “As we instructed our delegate at the UN to say....”

MOSS: That's beautiful.

TREE: So I carefully cut out these quotations and sent them to Dick Gardner because I was pleased that not only was I proved right in my substantive and moral judgment, but also in my political judgment.

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MOSS: Excuse me one moment while I turn the tape over.

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

MOSS: We were talking about the questions of religious and racial intolerance and so on. There were a great to-do at one point about the treatment of Jews in Morocco I believe. Do you recall anything of that? I know there was considerable pressure on the White House to do something.

TREE: Yes, I do. But actually, at that point it wasn't so much the Jews in Morocco that were being discriminated against, but the religion called Bahai, which is a sort of Moslem religion, combining all the idealistic aspects of Unitarianism I should say.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE:               And there were very few members of this religion in Morocco, but the leaders had been thrown into jail, and it was rumored that they were to be executed.

I know that the State Department, behind the scenes, talked to the Moroccan ambassador about this. And when I went to Morocco on a semi-official visit with Governor Stevenson during March, I should think it was 1964 or '65, I talked to the foreign secretary—a marvelous man—and to various other members of the foreign office about this, and was interested to read a few months later that the sentences for execution of the Bahai members had been remanded and many of them had been let out of jail. I think that this is very important, when a country feels very strongly about a principle, it should attempt to talk to another government behind the scenes and not in the newspapers, then sometimes, positive results in the field of human rights can be achieved.

MOSS:               Coming around to that, did you ever get any sympathetic response to your concern for Jews in the Soviet Union in the outside-of-committee social contacts with the Russians? Any response there at all?

TREE:               No, none whatsoever. They were perfectly furious with me because I really could hit them just as hard as they....In fact, I think they were more hurt by my attacks that we were by theirs. They seemed to take them more seriously.

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MOSS:               Uh-huh. Let me come to the question of the Cuban Missile Crisis. You said you had something that you wanted to talk about there on the, perhaps with the Stevenson episode in the Security Council.

TREE:               I'd known about the Cuban Missile Crisis, of course, before it broke in the papers.

MOSS:               How did it come to your attention?

TREE:               Stevenson told me that this U-2 airplane had spotted the missiles going into place and had had the photographs of them, and that there was going to be a cabinet meeting about this situation within a few days; and that's why he had to go to Washington instead of doing something else. I think, I'm pretty sure, that I'm the only person he told about this. He told me of high secret matters from' time to time because I think he was a man who had to verbalize his ideas, and he knew that I was absolutely safe to tell, that I wouldn't breathe it to another soul, which of course I did not. Is this all right to tell now?

MOSS:               Surely.

TREE: So, when Stevenson returned from the cabinet meeting and the news did break in the newspapers, and there was a USN Security Council [United States National Security Council] meeting on this matter, Stevenson was well prepared. Because he had time—a short time—to write a really first-class speech accusing the Soviets of putting the missiles into Cuba. As you remember, he said he would wait until all hell froze over for the Soviets to admit that they had put missiles there, because of course Ambassador Malik [Yakov Alexandrovich Malik] denied in the Security Council that they had placed the missiles in Cuba.

This made Stevenson tremendously popular throughout the United States. People identified with him that had never identified with him before as many thought of him as an intellectual and a highbrow, but he used words—and outrage—that they could very easily understand.

MOSS: This was the first time anybody had really seen him angry or stubborn.

TREE: Yes. And it did a great, great deal to bolster his confidence.

MOSS: Do you know anything of his feeling about the way the whole crisis was handled?

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TREE: I think he was very pleased about the way it was handled. But as I remember it, on this particular crisis there were two bases near the Soviet Union—one in Turkey and one somewhere else...

MOSS: Italy. Jupiter missiles.

TREE: Italy. That we were going to give up anyway. And Stevenson...

MOSS: Yes. Well, we were going to pull the missiles out of the bases.

TREE: Oh. But we were also going to give up the bases, is that not so?

MOSS: Well, I think the record can be checked on that. I'm not clear on that.

TREE: In any case, we were going to diminish the power of these bases anyway. So Stevenson thought that it might be a tactical move to say to the Soviet Union, "We will diminish the power of these bases if you in turn will pull your missiles out of Cuba." Kennedy, Bundy, Rusk, etc. were against this approach, and again accused him in the cabinet of being soft on Russia, etc. This disturbed Stevenson to a certain extent, but that was all forgotten when he put in such a magnificent performance at the Security Council. I think he was very pleased at the way it was handled. Strangely enough, he never mentioned Bobby Kennedy's [Robert K. Kennedy] role in this, and I wish that he had—at least I don't remember him doing so.

MOSS: Yes, because others have credited Robert Kennedy with a very critical role in the whole thing.

TREE: Exactly.

MOSS: Particularly McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], and others have.

TREE: I wish he had. But naturally he was less in sympathy with Bobby even than with the President. Or perhaps that's not the best way to express it. He was not at ease with Bobby.

MOSS: Uh-huh. Different characters.

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TREE: Bobby was always rather abrasive to Adlai. I hate that word, abrasive.

MOSS: It seems to have stuck, doesn't it?

TREE: [Laughter] Well, Bobby wasn't like that later on as you know when he ran for president. His character seemed to have changed mightily in the intervening period. But we won't go into that now.

No, I think that Stevenson on the whole thought that it was managed very well. And also it was managed very well by the UN itself: by U Thant, who as you remember sent down General Rikhye [Indar Jit Rikhye], who was the head of the UN armed forces, such as they were. And General Rikhye would communicate with U Thant's right hand man, C.V. Narasimhan [Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan], by telephone. And I remember Stevenson asking Thant if they wanted to use the scrambler telephone for security reasons. U Thant said "No, they've got something much better. They've got much higher security than the scrambler. They speak in Hindi to each other." Did you know that?

MOSS: No. That's very good. Something occurred to me along the lines we were talking. What was it? Oh, it's completely gone now. Well, at any rate, let me ask you about the assassination and the reception of the news at the UN, by yourself, the UN mission, and the UN itself.

TREE: Perhaps I should start with the moment when I myself heard about the assassination. Bill Attwood [William H. Attwood], who was the U.S. delegate to the Fourth Committee at that time—I was his adviser—and I were giving a lunch here in this house for about fifteen or so of the delegates of the Fourth Committee—most of them Africans—when my daughter Penelope [Penelope Tree] came downstairs round-eyed and white, and said, "I've just heard on the radio that the President has been shot." It was such an impossible piece of news that I quite blocked it out. I looked at Bill, and he was in the same state of disbelief. So, we therefore decided—having heard so many phony rumors hundreds of thousands of times in the past that we decided to pay no

attention to it, and went on with the lunch.

MOSS: That's the first time I've heard someone else having the same reaction that I did.

TREE: Really?

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MOSS: I simply went off to the store, we were on our way to the grocery store, and continued, you know. It just seemed so impossible that no need to pay any attention to it.

TREE: Penelope said this to me quite privately when she came into the dining room. I didn't even bother to discuss it with the delegates who were witting on either side of me. And then before the lunch was over she came down again and said, "They think he's been killed—oh, they think he's died." So, it was then that the delegates all got up—we'd just finished lunch—and left the house with great expressions of sympathy and shock. Then, Bill and I went back to the United Nations where they had quickly convened a meeting of the General Assembly. And it was easy to see how Kennedy was loved by this group from all over the world—loved, revered. All of the delegates were really deeply shaken and made more beautiful speeches about his loss and about his terrible death.

There was hardly a delegate in the hall who didn't come up to Stevenson or to members of the delegation to express their profound sorrow. I remember going back to Stevenson's flat after this was over, because he had to go straight down to Washington to a cabinet meeting. I cooked him some supper. It was very hard for him to take in also. The only protection was to talk about little familiar things like who will take on the meetings tomorrow while I'm away, or what should be done at the United Nations when the funeral is going on?—those kind of little details that somehow or other help you.

To him personally I think it was a terrible flow. Politically, he feared Johnson becoming president because he knew Johnson of old and didn't particularly trust or like him. But this is part of another story. Adlai also thought that, whereas he didn't have much influence on policy under Kennedy, that things were going fairly well and that Kennedy had learned a great deal in the years since he'd become President. Stevenson could look forward to policies which he could very easily support. At the same time, he was planning—or talking about rather than planning—on retiring from the U.S. mission. He didn't see any other job in view. He didn't think he'd ever be made Secretary of State, and he didn't want any other kind of job, although he'd been asked informally if he wanted to be an ambassador to any country. He was always worried about money, falsely so as it turns out, and felt that he should get back to his law firm and start to practice, because he thought he was of an age where he would have to start a new life, or if he

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stayed on for another few years there wouldn't be the chance to start it. So he was thinking very seriously about retirement from the government. This all comes round to the fact that he thought of himself as an older man, and therefore he was totally dumbfounded that Kennedy—who he thought of as a young man and as President for years to come and a huge influence on this country—should die before him.

The day before the funeral, I was posted at Kennedy with several other members of the mission to meet the incoming officials from various countries.

MOSS: At Kennedy....

TREE: At Kennedy Airport.

MOSS: You mean then Idlewild Airport.

TREE: Oh sorry! Then Idlewild. Of course.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: I remember most of the government representatives arrived in the evening, and most of them looked perfectly ghastly. I suppose they were all terribly tired and had sat up all night the night before sending cables, making arrangements, and then had taken this long heavy trip on top of it. I thought that many of them were going to die before they got to the funeral. Well, I met them at the plane, got them through immigration quickly and on to their next conveyance to Washington. But on the day of the funeral—and naturally I won't go into any more of my reactions, they were typical of everybody's, predominantly shock—it was my job to take down to the funeral the high officials of the UN: U Thant, Ralph Bunche [Ralph J. Bunche], Paul Hoffman [Paul G. Hoffman], one other I've forgotten. They all appeared at the plane in rented morning coats and stiff collars and looked very funny. Especially poor U Thant, whose collar kept climbing up on his neck behind. And he's a good deal shorter than I am, so, as part of my duties of escortage, I kept pushing the collar down—like a governess—all during the day.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: A car met us at the airport in Washington, and we went to the State Department right away, where Harlan Cleveland presided over his department. There were sandwiches on the desk which I wisely put into my bag for my clients on the long drive to the cemetery. We then

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drove to the church and heard Cushing's [Richard James Cushing] gravelly, tragic, rather high-pitched voice do the mass in Latin. I kept wondering what U Thant was thinking, this Buddhist, listening to a Catholic service. Then I got them organized and into a car to go to the grave.

After that event, U Thant called me his den-mother. And I think that is one of the reasons why he employed me subsequently. I don't think I've got anything more particular to say about the funeral that hasn't been said a thousand times.

MOSS: Let me impose on you a little bit more and change the subject to Robert Kennedy for a bit...

TREE: Yes.

MOSS: ...and ask his coming into New York, running for the Senate, and his subsequent try for the Democratic nomination as president.

TREE: Yes. President Johnson has in his book a statement—in his book *The Valiant Years*—the statement that Stevenson had been....

MOSS: Beg your pardon. Johnson's book?

TREE: Yes.

MOSS: *Vantage Point*.

TREE: Is that what it's called? [Laughter]

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: Who wrote *The Valiant Years*?

MOSS: Was it one of Eisenhower's [Dwight D. Eisenhower]? I don't recall.

TREE: I guess so. I don't know. It's an interesting slip, and a surprising one. That Stevenson had wanted to run for the Senate from New York and Johnson had backed him in this and therefore he could not back Bobby Kennedy when he came to ask for his support. This surprises me very much, because as far as I know it is totally untrue. Actually, Wagner [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.], Bob Wagner—I can't remember if he was mayor then or not, but I think he was—implored Stevenson to run for the Senate from New York.

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MOSS: Yes, as I remember, he was trying to head off Robert Kennedy with a Stevenson...

TREE: As you say, he was trying to head off Robert Kennedy with a Stevenson candidacy.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: But Stevenson definitely didn't want it. I asked him why, because I would have thought it would have been a perfect job for him. He replied that as a junior senator he would never cut any ice. But, more than that, he couldn't stand the idea of campaigning. He said, "Paul Douglas [Paul H. Douglas] works as hard as anybody in the Senate, and yet every weekend he goes back to the small towns in Illinois, marches up and down the streets with a bull-horn making speeches; he has no real life at all and is perpetually exhausted." He said, "I know I haven't got the physical resources for this." Now, at this time, Senator....

MOSS: Keating [Kenneth B. Keating]?

TREE: No, I'm now talking about the Republican senator from Illinois.

MOSS: Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen].

TREE: Senator Dirksen was very ill. And it was thought he was going to die. And Kerner [Otto Kerner, Jr.] and Daley [Richard J. Daley] let it be known to Stevenson that should he die, they would appoint him senator. Adlai wasn't even sure he wanted that. But, in any case, he was certain he didn't want to run from New York for the Senate. So Johnson was quite wrong; I think that he really made this natural mistake because he blocked out not wanting to back Bobby for the Senate. In my opinion, Bobby changed as much as anybody could possibly change from the time he was elected senator to the time that he was assassinated. He became so "possessed"—that's the only work one can think of—by the fate of the blacks, and the poor, the unfortunate and miserable in this country, that he forgot his own ego completely. I would say that in the last six months of his life he became almost incandescent because of his own concern for the poor and the discriminated against in this country.

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MOSS: Let me take you back to the beginning of that, when you first knew that he was coming in to New York. What were your own reactions, what were the reactions of the people around you...

TREE: My own reactions were very anti, but I didn't express it because—I don't know why. Perhaps some sense of self-preservation. And perhaps I wanted to be proved wrong in my feelings that he was abrasive, out for himself, not concerned with the issues, hurtful of others' feelings who were concerned people. I remember he had a meeting here in New York with a group of representative civil rights leaders when he was Attorney General. They were horrified by his lack of sensitivity and understanding of their situation, and of the blacks in general. It's simply amazing to me how much he changed later on. He just came full circle, practically. Well, I guess "half circle" is the correct way of saying it.

In any case, I remember sitting next to him one night at Averell Harriman's for dinner. The first march on Washington was to take place the next day, organized by Bayard Rustin [Bayard Taylor Rustin], where Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] would make the "I have a dream" speech. Bobby was terrible contemptuous of Rustin. He said, "That sad old black fairy." And he was frightfully scornful of Martin Luther King. Said he'd lost some of his influence, and that he really wasn't a serious person. It was then that I found out the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] had trailed King everywhere trying to get the goods on him, and had a good deal of information about his carrying on with other ladies, etc.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: In fact...

MOSS: Did Robert Kennedy mention that at the time?

TREE: Yes. He was altogether completely scornful...

MOSS: I wanted to pin this down. Did he talk in specific terms about the bugging and so forth?

TREE: He talked in specific terms about Rustin. No, he did not talk about that then. I'm sorry I learned about that later.

MOSS: Yes. Okay.

TREE: Naturally I showed my dissent with Bobby that even because I thought the march was a very

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important and wonderful thing, and was rousing the Congress and the country to look at the plight of the black in America. I was horrified that the attorney general could talk this way. And that was another one of the reason why I didn't want him to run from New York...

MOSS: Do you recall his response to your dissent?

TREE: He was very contemptuous of me, because he put me into a category, which I resented deeply, of being a softy, a fuzzy-minded liberal, etc. Well, it is all the more ironic that towards the end he should be so strongly pro helping the blacks, helping the disadvantaged and the poor. And personally, I worked for him with a fervor when he was running for the nomination for presidency. In fact I was one of three of his delegates in New York City who were running against the Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] and McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] delegates and spoke a great deal for

him. I even went out to California and Oregon to speak for him; I felt passionately about him and about his leadership and the way he voiced his concern for all Americans and for these great causes.

MOSS: Let me come back to the beginning of that...

TREE: In fact, I can't believe that I shall ever fall in love politically again.

MOSS: Yes, I think many of us feel that way. Let me come back to the beginning of his senatorial candidacy again. In New York, you have to put together a political organization that can carry the reformers, that can carry the Harlem group, that can carry the upstate crowd, that can take care of the regulars. Now, how did he put this together, and how did he go after your particular group? I'll leave that purposely undefined.

TREE: He left the going after our particular group to people like Arthur Schlesinger, although I can't remember if he played any role in this election. I don't think he did. But to people like that. I'm a little bit hazy about that campaign because I was working at the General Assembly of the UN and on election day I was in Chile representing the US at the inauguration of President Frei [Eduardo Montalva Frei]. I do remember the regulars hating him, because he had hurt their feeling so much in the campaign of 1960. Bobby found out then for the first time just how inefficient the regular organization was.

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I remember also that he was very strongly backed by Buckley [Charles A. Buckley], who was the last great boss in New York State. As you remember, he was the leader of the Bronx organization, and Buckley was anathema to the liberals, as you can imagine.

MOSS: Yes. You have Jack [John F. English] coming up in Suffolk [Suffolk County] also supporting him fairly early, too.

TREE: Yes, he did. And that was important to the liberals that Jack English backed him. Jack was very much on the ascendant at that time himself, and was admired by the liberals. In fact, he was one of them. But lots of the liberals also thought that Jack simply accepted a fait accompli and that he would have no access to power unless he did back Bobby, or, no chance to push his own candidate, Gene...

MOSS: Keough [Eugene James Keough]?

TREE: No. Gene Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson] the Nassau County executive.

MOSS: Oh. No, I'm sorry.

TREE: ...for a future office again, unless he had Bobby's backing.

MOSS: Yeah, I knew that...

TREE: Again, Bobby was resented because he had so much money and could snow all the other candidates.

MOSS: When did it become clear in New York that Robert Kennedy would run for the presidential nomination?

TREE: He announced, as you may remember.

MOSS: Right.

TREE: ...at the president convention of 1968. I remember going to his announcement party in Atlantic City.

MOSS: '64, you mean.

TREE: Excuse me. 1964. Oh! It's terrible to be so poor on dates. He announced at the convention, and I remember going to a reception for him on the day that he announced.

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MOSS: Oh. Well, this is the senatorial. Yes, this is for the senatorial.

TREE: Oh, you're talking now about for the presidential.

MOSS: No, I asked about the presidential. Yes. When did this first come to your attention? When did you get an inkling that it was going to happen? How did it develop? This kind of thing.

TREE: Arthur Schlesinger was the first to tell me because he had been urging Bobby to enter the New Hampshire primary, and he had told me that a great many of Bobby's advisers had told him not to, for a variety of reasons which I'm sure you all know. When McCarthy won the primary and President Johnson made the startling announcement that he was through, Arthur told me that Bobby had now decided to go in because he saw that there might be a chance; but more than that, that when he had spoken against Johnson before Johnson had made the announcement of retirement, that papers interpreted it as simply personal animosity. Bobby couldn't, therefore, get the issues on which he felt so strongly in front of the country, or where he differed over the issues with Johnson such as the Vietnamese war, because it would all be interpreted as personal animosity. However, with Johnson out of the picture, Kennedy felt that it was all right for him to enter the race, because he would be listened to on the issues and not, as I say,

on this personal dislike basis. I thought this thesis was logical, and accepted it. But lots of people, especially in the McCarthy camp, never forgave him, as you know, thinking that he was simply being an...

MOSS: Opportunist.

TREE: ...opportunist, when he saw that McCarthy had won the New Hampshire primary.

MOSS: How did he begin to organize the campaign here in New York? How did you get into it?

TREE: I got into it shortly after he announced. I remember the day I came back from Barbados, where my husband and I have a house, Bill Walton [William Walton], who was one of Bobby's trusted lieutenants and in charge of the New York operation, came to lunch here and asked me to be a delegate. I guess he asked me over the telephone before he came to lunch whether I would be a delegate, and after a day or two of thinking about it, I decided to; because by this time I was feeling much more positively about Bobby and his concerns, and his sincerity.

[-44-]

TREE: Well, I started out by saying that at first I hadn't been for Bobby and I soon changed, and with fervor, when I saw his mounting concern and sincerity for the poor and the unfortunate of this country. I felt that he was the one person, who could heal the terrible rifts which were then appearing between the blue collar groups and the white collar groups and the minorities. I felt that he was the only person who could unite this country, go forward with strong momentum towards curing our ills, towards greater, prosperity for all, and also towards building a sane foreign policy. Bobby was, absolutely right on all the foreign policy issues. He was against nuclear tests. Underground, he was for disarmament, he was a strong supporter of the UN, he was generally very sensible I thought.

MOSS: Was your role limited to speechmaking or did you get into...

TREE: And of course he was against the Vietnamese war, which had become such an issue by then.

MOSS: Was your role strictly speechmaking, or did you get involved in organization or fundraising or any of the other?

TREE: Yes, in New York I did. I went to the Kennedy office every day and worked in setting up meetings for Ethel Kennedy [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]—who was a marvelous campaigner as you probably know—and organizing fund raising groups.

MOSS: Who were some of the backers? Who were some of the people you were not able to get?

TREE: I was not able to get people who were very close to me. My husband's cousin, Mrs. Marshall Field, remained adamantly anti-Kennedy. I've never understood quite why. And a good many of the women of her generation, like Mrs. Max Ascoli, and Mrs. Joseph Lash, again, they thought of Bobby as his original image, of a sort of egocentric brash little iconoclast.

MOSS: Sounds like the Eleanor Roosevelt feeling all over again.

TREE: Yes. Well, they were all great friends of Mrs. Roosevelt's and all had the same attitude.

[-46-]

MOSS: Who were some of the people who were quite ready to support him? Who were his most enthusiastic supports amongst the fund providers?

TREE: Well, very few of my age group. And very few of the "liberals." They were divided up between Humphrey and McCarthy. It was mostly the very young group that I hadn't known before, who had not been active politically before Kennedy became president, like Carter Burden, and Bartle Bull, and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] if you will, and John Heimann.

MOSS: What role did Bill Walton have in this? He had the same role as he'd had in the '60 campaign, organizing...

TREE: Well, in the '60 campaign he was sort of the head Kennedy organizer in New York. His main job was to coordinate the efforts of the regular organization and the citizens' organization. In this particular campaign for Bobby, there was no need to do this. The regular organization was for Bobby, led by John Burns [John J. Burns]—the State Chairman—and a very up-and-coming new leader of Erie County, whose name I've now forgotten. Joe something...

MOSS: Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle]?

TREE: Yes.

MOSS: Right.

TREE: Good for you.

MOSS: I'm not a New York expert by any means, so I'm fishing for some of these.

TREE: And of course the regular organization---Brooklyn, etc. was for him, but not as much for him as I expected they would be, because they are essentially quite conservative on all the issues, and they understood that Bobby was not. There were people like Gene Keough, great friends of mine, who never said they were against Bobby, but we knew that they were not for him.

MOSS: Yes. [Interruption.]

[-47-]

TREE: It was quite exciting to work for Bobby, first because I admired him so deeply, and had such an enthusiastic feeling about his stand on the issues, more than I'd had even for Stevenson when I was working for Stevenson. Because he was on fire with his passionate beliefs about what should be done and what had to be done to improve our society.

MOSS: I'm going to hypothesize here for a moment, that there was an attitude of—not, I don't want to characterize it as desperation—but an urgency and that somehow this kind of enthusiasm, this kind of visionary appeal, was in light of a last best hope kind of thing. Is that fair to characterize it that way?

TREE: Last best hope for America you mean.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: Yes, I think that is so. I think we were all so terribly concerned by the divisions in America, which had been exacerbated by the war. I remember fearing the attitudes of most of the trade unions, and the "blue collars," fearing that these divisions were going to wreck our society, as they very nearly have.

MOSS: Yes.

TREE: Bobby realized this only too well, and also realized that he was possibly the last person who could bring everybody together, to marching together, as Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] had brought these disparate groups, when he was president.

MOSS: Do you recall any particular occasions on which you either saw him in action in a small group or a large one during the campaign that would be interesting?

TREE: I remember he had come back from working in the primary in Indiana, and came to a rally to pep up his workers at a place called the Inn of the Clock, which was in the UN Plaza. Instead of talking about Indiana—whether we were going to win it or not or what the problems were out there—and there were considerable problems... [Interruption]

[-48-]

And instead of making a sort of pep-up speech to the workers about “We’re going to win,” as so often candidates do, he only asked us to imagine what it would be like to be an Indian on a reservation. He described the tragedy of the lives of Indian children and adolescents. I remember his saying that the suicide rate of Indians on reservations is something like triple the rest of the country. He was in such anguish over their lives that he quite forgot to mention how he was going in Indiana. Well, that really struck me. I was so impressed, and so moved. I think it was at that moment that I was totally converted.

MOSS: Uh-huh. I can’t think of anything more that I have, I was just checking over my notes. Is there anything that occurs to you at this point?

TREE: I don’t think so. I think I’ve talked much too much. There’s nothing in here of any interest. No, I think that it’s more or less done.

MOSS: Okay. Fine. Thank you very much indeed.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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