

Jerome Kretchmer Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 07/19/1973
Administrative Information

Creator: Jerome Kretchmer
Interviewer: Roberta A. Greene
Date of Interview: July 19, 1973
Place of Interview: New York, New York
Length: 23 pages

Biographical Note

Jerome Kretchmer was a member of the New York State Assembly, Manhattan, 1963 – 1970 and a campaign worker for Robert Kennedy's 1964 Senate campaign and Presidential campaign of 1968. This interview focuses on early recollections of Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], RFK's 1964 campaign, and RFK's 1968 campaign, among other issues.

Access Restrictions

Open

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed on January 8, 1991, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Jerome Kretchmer, recorded interview by Roberta A. Greene, July 19, 1973, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of
Jerome Kretchmer

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Jerome Kretchmer, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of personal interviews conducted on July 19, 1973 at New York, NY and prepared for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be made available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.


(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.



Donor

11/28/90

Date



Archivist of the United States

Jan. 8, 1991

Date

Jerome Kretchmer – RFK #1
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Early recollections of Robert F. Kennedy [RFK]
2	RFK's 1964 campaign and Kretchmer's role
5	RFK as 1965 guest speaker at reform club
6	Involvement in the leadership fight
7	Kretchmer's run or the New York State Assembly
9	Samuel J. Silverman's campaign in 1966
10	RFK's views of the reformers like Kretchmer
11	Kretchmer's role in the Frank D. O'Connor campaign of 1966
12	Kretchmer's views of RFK and political candidates in New York
14	RFK falls through on the leadership fight of 1967
14	Conversations about RFK entering the presidential race of 1968
16	Theories of RFK's assassination in Los Angeles
16	Kretchmer's involvement in the 1968 Kennedy campaign in Indiana
22	Political situation in New York in 1968

Oral History Interview

with

JEROME KRETCHMER

July 19, 1973
New York, New York

By Roberta A. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project
of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: You couldn't remember last time when you first met the senator, but why don't you just begin with your earliest recollections, whatever they are.

KRETCHMER: I can't remember the first time I ever met him. Did I remember the last time?

GREENE: No. No, I say just your earliest recollections because you couldn't remember last time.

KRETCHMER: I can't remember the first time. I can't remember when

GREENE: Do you remember from your early impressions whether he was different from what you had expected or pretty much what you'd been led to believe?

KRETCHMER: I'm just trying to remember now. We were farmed to the Senate in 1964, a group of us from the West Side . . . I don't have any recollection of whether he came to New York. You must know that. Did he come to New York? Did we meet with him? I mean Ronnie [Ronnie Eldridge] or

GREENE: Well, her first recollection was a party at the guy's father's house, remember?

KRETCHMER: What guy's?

GREENE: I've got it right here. Bob Wechsler's [Robert Wechsler] father's house, that was her first recollection of meeting him. She said the reformers were all ready to leap on him, and in came this small sort of shy man instead of the monster they'd all expected. Something along those lines.

KRETCHMER: I was at that meeting but don't have any recollection of it.

GREENE: Okay, then it can't be very important. Do you have anything specific about

KRETCHMER: It could be important. I just don't remember things like that. I don't remember. I guess I remember flying in the Caroline from New York to Albany, during the 1965

GREENE: . . . leadership fight?

KRETCHMER: . . . fight, right.

GREENE: Was there anything before that?

KRETCHMER: I remember him being vague, kind of obfuscating, and all of that conversation about but what kind of role he was playing and whether he was really doing anything. But you must get some contacts from the campaign in 1964.

GREENE: Well, what about your role in 64, even if they weren't directly

KRETCHMER: Well, I remember what I did. I acted as kind of a go-between between the reform movement and the Kennedy campaign. But what I really remember doing mostly is negotiating with Steve [Stephen E. Smith] and O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and negotiating over the distribution of literature, and getting the literature, and what the literature will say. I remember Haddad [William F. Haddad] writing literature, and being all involved with that stuff. And I don't have any recollection of any contact with the senator at that point.

GREENE: Well what do you remember about how you finally ended up with the reformers, who you were able to bring around and

KRETCHMER: We had everybody finally, I mean. There were two phases: there was, one, winning him the nomination. I remember being on the floor of the convention at the [New York] Armory. . . I remember all of that. And I remember actually working in the campaign and Jim Ottenberg worked in that campaign, Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] had offices on the third floor at 90 E. 42nd [Street]. In the back upstairs Dolan had a private room and Steve was on either the first or second floor, I remember, on the right-hand side as you come up the stairs. We didn't have that much contact with the

senator.

GREENE: But if it relates to the campaign, the fact that it wasn't direct, you know. . . .

KRETCHMER: Well, you know. I remember doing some memorandum about what the campaign ought to be like and what we needed and how much it was going to cost to do it and all of that stuff. I remember getting involved in the newspaper with the last literature distribution of the campaign. It was a great newspaper, I remember that.

GREENE: What did you do to bring the reformers around, because so many of them, particularly the Jewish people, were pretty strongly opposed to him at first, weren't they?

KRETCHMER: I don't know, I mean, being for a candidate is a funny thing. I think the political history of being for candidates is that you become attracted to people and then you spend a lot of time making excuses about who they are and what they do and how they do it. . . .

GREENE: Justifying your sympathy.

KRETCHMER: Sure. I have a vague recollection of being in a meeting in a hotel room with Abe [Abraham D. Beame]. We were sitting on the floor, and my remembrance is, it was the senator's hotel room. Anyone else tell you that? He was changing his shirt.

GREENE: Beame?

KRETCHMER: No, the senator was. I think Abe came there and we all met in an effort to get us to help Abe.

GREENE: Who else was there? Do you remember?

KRETCHMER: I don't remember. We called Abe. He said to go fuck himself. He was out of his mind. He didn't really care. I mean it was an act. It was clear that . . .

GREENE: Did a lot of people resent being asked to do those things, to get involved?

KRETCHMER: I don't think so. He was the party leader and that's what he was supposed to do.

GREENE: Did a lot of people tell him no?

KRETCHMER: From time to time, sure. I don't think we had too

much of it. . . . listen we didn't have a lot of experience. I mean, we had 1964, which was his campaign. We had '65 which was the Beame campaign in which we said no. We had '66 which was the O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor] campaign, in which I said yes. Boy, was I stupid. And . . .

GREENE: The Silverman [Samuel J. Silverman]?

KRETCHMER: . . . '66, the Silverman thing which had come first, which we were for--I mean we really wanted to do that. I guess we felt we had conned him a little bit in '66 in the Silverman thing. And in '67 there was nothing. And in '68 we worked for him. So, I mean, I don't think there was a lot of, you know,

GREENE: So people didn't automatically jump on the bandwagon because they were asked?

KRETCHMER: Yeah. I think he had a group of people that did. I think that the people who had their own political identity didn't. You know, me or Al [Alfred H. Blumenthal] or Freddie [Manfred Ohrenstein] or Ronnie--although Ronnie is certainly the most loyal to him and the most unquestioning. But the other side of that is, you know, the Schmertzses [Herbert Schmertz] and the Hannans [Tim Hannan and Tom Hannan] and everybody. I mean they just did everything he asked them to, and they had no political sense of their own. I mean, I think that maybe in their hearts they were for Klein [Arthur G. Klein] and Silverman. I mean they all worked in the Silverman campaign. They had a very regular instinct about politics. They didn't like all the insurgency.

GREENE: Would you include Tolan [James H. Tolan] in that group, too?

KRETCHMER: I know Tolan better now than I knew him then. I mean, he was kind of a shadowy figure in those days. I didn't know him very well. I just saw him a couple of months ago because I was up at his law firm trying to convince him and some of the guys that I needed some dough when I was running. I think Tolan was pretty well. . . . And then there was the next level down, guys like Jack Bush, I remember Shula, Hal Gooday. One of the interesting things is that his dad. . . . I don't know how good any of those guys were. They all worked for Al this last time around and didn't seem to be able to do much. Reportedly they were working for Al. Al had been coming into things like trying to teach his advance men and things like that.

But I don't remember a lot of things about the senator. I told you that. I mean I think they convene in blocks. I remember two meetings, two times I saw him in Indiana. Early in the morning we

met at his house--the apartment--to talk about his being a candidate; I remember the letter. . . .

GREENE: You know, one thing I did what to say. You mentioned the letter you wrote him when he was away skiing, and I checked our files and we don't have a copy of it.

KRETCHMER: Too bad.

GREENE: You don't have it? You never kept a copy?

KRETCHMER: No.

GREENE: Well, it might be just out of order or something, but it wasn't in the personal files, because I went through them myself again, this week.

KRETCHMER: Maybe he never got it.

GREENE: Yes, or sometimes if it comes away from the office that way, maybe he, you know, never brought it back and gave it to somebody to file.

KRETCHMER: Too bad, it was a good letter.

GREENE: Anyway in 1965 you did say that you invited him to speak to your reform club and he showed up, early in '65. Do you remember that?

KRETCHMER: We had a big dinner, and he was the guest speaker. I think the dinner was in Peter Strauss's honor, as I recall, to celebrate the one man-one vote victory and Kennedy was the guest there. It was a big successful dinner.

GREENE: He supposedly hated those occasions so much, these political. . . . How was he?

KRETCHMER: Terrific.

GREENE: His displeasure didn't show?

KRETCHMER: I don't think he was as displeased as everybody would say. I think he was an actor. Everybody likes to be adored, well received.

GREENE: Was he good about doing those things when you asked him?

KRETCHMER: I asked him and he did it. Nobody's good about doing those things. I don't think it ever has

anything to do with the guy; I think it has to do with his staff. I think everybody is so determined to protect their guy that you never get a true sense of whether he likes those things or whether he doesn't like those things, whether he does them or doesn't do them.

GREENE: There weren't other occasions that you asked him to do things like that?

KRETCHMER: I'm not that kind of a person. I asked for very little. I never sold him either. I mean I never said, "Oh Jesus, you know, I can get somebody to come in." It was just too much trouble. You think back now, and the whole period of time was really so short, just three and a half years. Not even three and a half years, right? Three years and four months. When was he shot, in May?

GREENE: June.

KRETCHMER: June. Three years and six months. Probably four years. I probably met him in June four years before. . . . Before that night. It's just four years.

GREENE: It's almost exactly four years.

KRETCHMER: Wow, Jesus Christ.

GREENE: Anyway, the part on the leadership fight was almost completely obliterated from the tape, but I do remember you said you took that trip up with him on the Caroline.

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right.

GREENE: You couldn't get a clear plan for what. . . .

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right, he was just bullshitting us. It turns out now in retrospect, I guess, that I was very naive, and he kept telling me he wasn't involved and I believed him.

GREENE: I think that, from what I have been able to gather, that's pretty much the truth.

KRETCHMER: Naaaaah, he was more involved. We ostensibly went. . . .

GREENE: Someone else will have to judge it, I guess.

KRETCHMER: Okay, sure. I don't know that it is terribly important. We went on the airplane ride ostensibly

so we could brief him on what was happening, on the adequacy of our performance.

GREENE: Were you working with Jack English [John F. English] then or. . . .

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right, we were, Jack English. Boy, outside of Nassau County, Jack hasn't had much luck. It's really phenomenal when you think about it, that he enjoys his reputation.

GREENE: Well, of course, it's hard to blame those things on him personally.

KRETCHMER: Yeah, but he's not going to win a campaign besides either a Kennedy campaign or a Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson] campaign in Nassau County. He's never had a successful Nickerson campaign outside of Nassau County. The Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] thing and. . . .

GREENE: Muskie? Anyway, there was one comment I did get off the tape that was a little bit confusing to me. You said that when the story first broke that Wagner [Robert F. Wagner] had made a deal with the Republicans--which had been rumored for some time up there, I guess--that you ran down the hall sort of as the messenger?

KRETCHMER: No, no, no. I saw it happen in the Senate, and it happened suddenly and by surprise and I ran down the hall to tell Stanley [Stanley Steingut] what had happened.

GREENE: Well, what do you remember about that?

KRETCHMER: Nothing. How is that relevant to Kennedy?

GREENE: Well, just in terms of what his people were doing. Did they make any effort to. . . .

KRETCHMER: It was over. At that moment they were electing Zaretski [Joseph L. Zaretski].

GREENE: And then the next year, I think you said, sort of by way of this having demonstrated your loyalty to them, when you were running for the whip, that the liberal party refused to support you?

KRETCHMER: No, no, I was running for the legislature, for the [New York State] Assembly.

GREENE: Oh. See, it was all obliterated on the tape; I couldn't tell.

KRETCHMER: The liberal party refused to . . . That was a special election in 1965 because of reapportionment. We were going into '66, and Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] was running for mayor and the liberal party refused to support me because I had supported Stanley.

GREENE: I get it now.

KRETCHMER: Then Kennedy called Alex [Alex Rose] but it didn't help. I remember that.

GREENE: Oh, he did.

KRETCHMER: Yeah, he said he would. I assume he did. He didn't have much clout with Alex.

GREENE: Does anyone?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, I think Lindsay did, for a long time.

GREENE: Anyway, in 1966 you and Blumenthal were both going after the whip's job. What do you remember about that and Kennedy's part in it?

KRETCHMER: Al was telling everybody he was the senator's candidate, and I called the senator. That I remember. I got him somewhere; I've forgotten where it was. I don't know. He was always someplace. That's the recollection I have--he wasn't around much.

GREENE: Did he deny it?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. He probably would, probably was lying to me. But I stopped Al from getting it.

GREENE: You stopped him, or the fact that you were both. . .

KRETCHMER: Well, neither one of us got it, so obviously I stopped him, right? I mean he was the senator's candidate and if the senator had put on his pressure, then my phone call to the senator either caused one of two things to happen. Either he had to withdraw from that position, or he had to continue that position and help Al get it. I would assume that had he really been into it, and had I not made the phone call and had he been for Al, I would have gotten it.

GREENE: Had he not been for Al?

KRETCHMER: Had he been for Al and I hadn't stopped him, you

know.

- GREENE: Oh, that Al would have gotten it?
- KRETCHMER: Yeah, right.
- GREENE: Did you ever get any feedback on something like that? How did he feel about two people that he was closely associated with . . .
- KRETCHMER: I haven't the vaguest idea.
- GREENE: . . . fighting over one job like that?
- KRETCHMER: I don't know.
- GREENE: He didn't feel that it was counterproductive, because he ended up with somebody. . . .
- KRETCHMER: It was counterproductive.
- GREENE: But he didn't take after you on it?
- KRETCHMER: It's counterproductive this time, too.
- GREENE: But you never got any feedback on it from him? Anything else on the whole legislative thing in New York?
- KRETCHMER: No.
- GREENE: What about on Silverman in 1966? Do you remember the first time you heard about that?
- KRETCHMER: We had been trying to mount a campaign against Klein and I just remember that somehow we wound up having this meeting with Kennedy in the basement of some hotel. What's it called?
- GREENE: I know which one but I can't think of the name of it right now. I know what you mean.
- KRETCHMER: We had this big discussion and I remember being ashamed of getting angry and I remember vague things about it, but we were still hoping we could discuss the end of it. You were never sure what you could do.
- GREENE: And this was just prior to that big Sunday night meeting?
- KRETCHMER: It was at the Sunday night meeting.

GREENE: Oh, because you said there was an earlier meeting that you and Ronnie and Blumenthal, I think, had with him prior to the Sunday night meeting. I got that much off the tape.

KRETCHMER: Yes? About that? No, it was a meeting that Ronnie and Al and I had with him about his being a candidate for president.

GREENE: Nothing prior to the Silverman?

KRETCHMER: There was a meeting prior to that but I don't remember who was there.

GREENE: And that's sort of where you came up with Silverman in the first place.

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. Yeah.

GREENE: But nothing specific?

KRETCHMER: What does Ronnie say about that?

GREENE: I don't really know. Right now I don't. I just wondered also if, when he got up and walked out of that meeting or threatened to leave--remember after there was a break--he got angry.

KRETCHMER: We're still on the meeting.

GREENE: Right, that was the Sunday night meeting, the bigger one. I don't know if you were involved in the discussions in that break and whether he sort of set the whole thing up as a means of putting the pressure on them to get together on Silverman, or if he was really genuinely angry and planned to walk out.

KRETCHMER: Who knew? How would you ever know?

GREENE: Well, I mean he hadn't discussed it?

KRETCHMER: Not with me.

GREENE: What do you remember him saying about the reformers, then and on other occasions?

KRETCHMER: Not much, I mean he thought we were silly. He couldn't put us down too hard because some of us worked very hard. He had to respect. . . .

GREENE: Well, did he distinguish between people like you and Ronnie and Blumenthal from the others?

KRETCHMER: If he had any sense he did. In every circumstance in which we really needed him we always seemed to be able to get to him, so I would assume that he made that. . . . He was, I guess, reasonably accessible, you see, and that was always my "sammie." If enough pressure was put on by enough people, you could get to him.

GREENE: Was the staff ever a problem in that?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, they always said no. I mean, it was a pain in the ass.

GREENE: Who specifically?

KRETCHMER: I don't know. At the end I wound up being relatively close to Dolan, so I really. . . .

GREENE: Okay. You said last time that you only got involved in the O'Connor campaign because Steve Smith asked you to, right? What did you actually do?

KRETCHMER: I ran the desks. He had this, I don't know, deputy campaign coordinator or deputy campaign manager, or something. [Interruption]

GREENE: You said last time that the only reason you went into the O'Connor thing was because Smith asked you to. Why would you have done that when you had refused to do the Beame campaign?

KRETCHMER: Well, the issues are much clearer. I mean, Beame, the mayor. . . . I think O'Connor was to me at that point a better fellow than Beame was. There was less difficulty announcing against Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller]. You know it would not have been a disaster if Lindsay became the mayor, so that's the difference. There were less bad guys around O'Connor, too, I think.

I think Steve's interest in O'Connor was, by my understanding, greater than their interest in Beame. I mean, I think they were really for O'Connor. I think they read him wrong. I think we all made an enormous mistake. O'Connor was a dud. But I don't think they knew that then, and I think they were really for O'Connor. He was Irish; I really think they had a phenomenal thing about that. They would do something much more quickly for a bad Irishman than they would for a good Jew. They were very into that. They certainly had an ethnic loyalty. So they were into the O'Connor campaign.

GREENE: Did you have much to do with O'Connor's people, or were you working pretty separately from them?

KRETCHMER: Separately.

GREENE: Did you ever get any feeling that O'Connor's people . . .

KRETCHMER: They didn't like us.

GREENE: Yeah, and that they didn't feel you were doing enough?

KRETCHMER: Well, I was breaking my ass, so you couldn't have been doing any more for them.

GREENE: No, but a general feeling about the Kennedy people, that they were sort of in a . . .

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. I mean, Steve did that. He always did that. His attention span was very short.

GREENE: I think I asked you this last time and you had an interesting answer, when I asked you whether you thought it was . . . Some people say that Kennedy never really wanted another Democratic leader in the state.

KRETCHMER: I said I didn't believe that that was true.

GREENE: Yeah, why?

KRETCHMER: I just think he had enough confidence in himself to know that he was really terrific, and that he would survive. Maybe I'm naive, but again I ascribe less. . . . That's a very base motive, and I don't think he had. . . . I think as he grew in stature, as he became a good senator and a good public figure, I think he got more and more confidence in himself, and I don't think he was threatened. If he had any insecurities, they were really about his own ambitions.

GREENE: I was just going to asks you, do you think it was just that he didn't see any candidates around to get too enthusiastic about?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, he said that. I mean it's just shit. They're still shit. I mean, it's really funny. It's six years later right? '66, '73. It's a lot of years later and there's still nobody.

GREENE: The same nobodies, too.

KRETCHMER: Sure, if you were going to pick a candidate for governor tomorrow morning in New York, who would you pick?

GREENE: I have no idea.

KRETCHMER: I feel exactly the same way. I'm sure he felt the same way. I mean, it's really hard because it deals with my own notion of myself. I think I'm a superior fellow, but by the same token I don't know that anybody would seriously think about me as a candidate for governor. Yet I think I'm immeasurably better than any of the guys that are now thinking about running. There's very little talent here.

GREENE: The other thing that you said, and I can't even remember how it came up, was that the Kennedys don't pay back, then you compared it to the Rockefellers. I had never heard anybody say that and I wonder if you had some specific thoughts on that, people you know of.

KRETCHMER: I know that Steve . . . I mean, I just never heard of him doing anything for anybody. He certainly never did anything for me. I just think that's really true. I think that they have an exalted sense of themselves and how important they are, and that you do it simply so that you can be next to them, and that they never do anything for anybody else. Do you know anybody they ever did anything for?

GREENE: Well, you're talking about supporting candidacies primarily?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. Political.

GREENE: Well, I think certainly in '66 Kennedy went out a lot and campaigned for people who had worked for his brother, and that sort of thing. I'm interested mainly in your thoughts on it, you know--whether you know people who had sought assistance in one way or another and not gotten it, rather than. . . . You know, the things you mentioned last time were Goldberg and yourself, and that is after Robert Kennedy's gone. I wondered if there's anything before that.

KRETCHMER: I was pointing to Steve. They think they want to do it for Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy]. They're going to be able to do it for Teddy because he looks like such a winner. I'm not convinced he's a winner by any stretch of the imagination. I think that these days are just terrible for him. I think all the references to the Chappaquiddick affair and the females would be an enormous issue. Maybe it's all over for those guys, I don't know, but I mean they don't give you a lot of good reasons to be for them, right?

GREENE: Do you know, like on jobs and things like that, if there were people who went to the senator?

KRETCHMER: I haven't the vaguest idea. I didn't function at that level.

GREENE: Okay. Then, as far as I know the next thing would be the Tammany leadership fight in 1967, when Ronnie. . . .

KRETCHMER: He promised her to help her. I think that's part of the same thing. I mean, he just never got on track; he never did what he said he was going to do; and when he finally decided he might really like to do it, it was too late.

GREENE: Well, whose fault was that? Do you think his staff didn't . . . ?

KRETCHMER: His, Steve's, Joe's [Joseph Dolan], everybody's. They just weren't into that. I mean, they were not into doing things for other people.

GREENE: Did you get involved at that level with the senator and Smith on that, trying to . . .

KRETCHMER: I called him. My recollection is of being away in the country, taking the first week in July off when all that happened, and talking to Ronnie two and three times a day on the telephone, but that's the only recollection.

GREENE: You didn't get in touch with them directly at all, then?

KRETCHMER: I think I talked to Joe, but it was a shitty conversation. He was just fucking around. He wasn't doing what he should have been doing.

GREENE: But you said last time--we ought to go through that again--that you didn't think it had affected Ronnie's relationship? She didn't. . . .

KRETCHMER: No. She bitched about it and took it.

GREENE: Is there anything else before that meeting in the apartment, when you started to talk about the possible presidential race?

KRETCHMER: No. I mean, there is a phone conversation, you know, urging him to run.

GREENE: How did he receive that?

KRETCHMER: Fine. He just didn't agree.

GREENE: Do you know when that was?

KRETCHMER: Just before the letter, I guess.

GREENE: Which was December?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. It must have been around Christmas because he was away, but it was after the McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] announcement because I remember saying in the letter that the McCarthy campaign isn't off the ground.

GREENE: Is off the ground?

KRETCHMER: Was not.

GREENE: Was not.

KRETCHMER: Well, it wasn't. You know, he won the primary in March, but in December he was really floundering.

GREENE: Right. Did he seem interested in the fact that you'd like to see him do it, or his mind was sort of turned off to it at that point?

KRETCHMER: No. He always was thinking about it. I always thought that that was the one period of time where the communication was handled with Joe, with Steve. I mean that was the time it was all for real, and maybe he could be president and maybe he couldn't, and it was his reservation about running against Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and establishing a reputation and having that happen. But he really cared about that, and they were listening to everything that was being said.

GREENE: And in February when you had that meeting at the apartment, what do you remember about that?

KRETCHMER: He just said that he wouldn't do it because everybody would think that he was mad at Johnson, and he just told them it was wrong.

GREENE: You didn't have any doubts at any point that that was really the reason?

KRETCHMER: Did I have any doubts? No, I didn't. Maybe it wasn't now, in retrospect, but I really believed in him. What do you think the reason was?

GREENE: I was just asking. I think that was. Since then there have been a lot of people who feel that he

lose . . . just was afraid to do it because he was afraid to

KRETCHMER: I don't think so.

GREENE: . . . and that, you know, he waited until McCarthy proved it.

KRETCHMER: Nah. That's shitless.

GREENE: Because he was. No.

KRETCHMER: He just made a political mistake, that's all, that he was well on the way to recovering from. Do you hear a lot about the theory that there were two assassins in Los Angeles?

GREENE: No.

KRETCHMER: There was a second gun, a second guy?

GREENE: No.

KRETCHMER: Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] has just come back from California full of ballistics tests and information that there was a second gun used.

GREENE: Actually fired?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. Well, the bullet in his head was not from Sirhan's [Sirhan B. Sirhan] gun.

GREENE: Where did he get that information?

KRETCHMER: The police record, he says.

GREENE: Did he do it for some purpose?

KRETCHMER: Because somebody called him while he was out there and told him that he ought to go over the files, on the theory that more than one guy was involved. Sirhan has always maintained that he doesn't remember anything that happened out there, along with these theories of somebody else out there that Sirhan was hypnotized and was part of it.

GREENE: Well, he said he was hypnotized. He had been working on self-hypnosis, as I remember.

KRETCHMER: Oh, yeah?

GREENE: I think the next thing, and maybe the last thing, is Indiana. If you just want to run through in a

narrative way, the way you got involved, and what you did when you got out there . . .

KRETCHMER: I got involved the night I came back from the Martin Luther King march in Memphis. I called Dorothy [Dorothy Kretchmer] at the house and said I was on my way to Albany, and she told me. Steve had called, and I called Steve and asked him what he wanted. He said he wanted us to go to Indiana. I said I couldn't go on account of the legislature, and he said he would make all the arrangements and we could fly back and forth if we had to and that that was no problem. So the next Sunday night we went to Indiana. We landed in Indianapolis. It was just a big headquarters, and it was clear there wasn't going to be much to do, and I wasn't interested in working in the headquarters, so we talked to John Douglas and to . . .

GREENE: Gerry Doherty [Gerald F. Doherty].

KRETCHMER: . . . Gerry Doherty the next morning, and I told them we'd do anything they wanted if they'd get us out of there. We flew in a small airline from there to Chicago, and we rode into Gary and when we got to Gary each senator was just there. There was a rally. We went to some big hall that afternoon, and we met the senator for a couple of minutes, and we talked to him, and the next morning we went to work in Gary. We worked in Gary right through. We had the senator about three or four times. We had him the day before the primary. It was the best political rally I've ever seen.

GREENE: Remember that motorcade?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. How do you know about that?

GREENE: Oh you know. It's in the books and everybody talks about it.

KRETCHMER: It was just spectacular.

GREENE: Sensational.

KRETCHMER: A mind blower.

GREENE: Who was in Gary when you got there? Was anybody?

KRETCHMER: A guy named Tom Farrell [Thomas Farrell] from New York, Judy Weiss and Billy Singer [William Singer] from Chicago; Dick Wade [Richard C. Wade] was around, kind of running around on the edge.

GREENE: How well organized were they?

KRETCHMER: I don't think it would be presumptuous of me to say. They were starting a campaign. I think they were all right. I think we had some ideas for them, and had some energy. We liked it a lot.

GREENE: Do you know the name Larry Karras at all? Was he in there?

KRETCHMER: Why?

GREENE: No, it was just a name I heard very recently as somebody that was working in Gary when nobody else seemed to be. This was prior to when you got there. I just wondered if he was . . .

KRETCHMER: I think we only spent about three or four weeks there. I don't think we were there very long.

GREENE: When you say after the march, do you mean after the funeral, or . . .

KRETCHMER: No, the day before.

GREENE: When you were at the garbage collecting . . .

KRETCHMER: The demonstration was on Monday, and the funeral was Tuesday. We got back on Monday night, and Stephen had called the house.

GREENE: So they really hadn't been out in Indiana very long then.

KRETCHMER: Had they?

GREENE: Well, the senator was going out for the first time to campaign extensively, was supposed to be starting the day that King was shot, remember?

KRETCHMER: Okay. So they had been in Indiana a couple of days, that's right. Four or five days elapsed. I remember leaving New York on a Sunday night and we flew into Gary on a Monday morning. We went to Indianapolis first. We were supposed to work in Indianapolis, but it was really a mistake, so we went up and we organized in Gary.

GREENE: You talked a lot about Hatcher [Richard B. Hatcher] last time. Were you working with anybody else or just . . .

KRETCHMER: The last couple of days we went in and made sure Hatcher gave the money out. That was all. I told you we had a lot of dough.

GREENE: Yes, and you also said. . . .

KRETCHMER: We had Bobby Fitz [Robert P. Fitzgerald] working with us.

GREENE: Bobby Fitz?

KRETCHMER: Gerald Fitz. He's Teddy and Bobby's cousin, and he carried the bag. He came in about ten days from the end, and we were all together right through the end. We had a lot of people in Gary. I mean, Rosemary Breslin was there for a couple of days, Jimmy's [Jimmy Breslin] wife, as a matter of fact. And we had people from Chicago. The one big guy. . . . Casmir Viceo Cazmeceo was a local Mexican kid.

GREENE: But you and Blumenthal were sort of the heads of the operation?

KRETCHMER: I worked outside; Al worked a lot inside. We managed to get through with it. I don't know that it had a head. We brought the busloads of kids in. I told you I did a college recruiting trip for a couple of days.

GREENE: Yes, and I think what you said about McCarthy was interesting, if you could repeat that. How you dealt with the McCarthy kids, and the pitch you made for Robert Kennedy as opposed to McCarthy.

KRETCHMER: I don't know. What did I say? I don't remember.

GREENE: I don't know that I remember the details either, and I couldn't get it off the tape.

KRETCHMER: You just try to get them away. I mean that was all. We just tried to point out that there was something lacking, there were qualities lacking in McCarthy, and that Bobby had those qualities. I really worked very hard at that.

GREENE: Was McCarthy spending a lot of money in that area?

KRETCHMER: He brought a lot of kids in.

GREENE: What about the moneyed blacks?

KRETCHMER: No.

GREENE: Because I had heard in Indianapolis, that McCarthy had already made a lot of arrangements with blacks before the Kennedy people even got there.

KRETCHMER: I don't know. We saw that in Gary. Jesus, it was a terrific time. It was so easy. I guess it's the only campaign I've ever been in, besides for myself, where there was no doubt. I told you that, about appropriateness and the rightness of what you were doing. Poor devil, he was a guy that was sure, and he was the best candidate for the president of the United States.

GREENE: When you say that this cousin, Fitz . . .

KRETCHMER: Bob Fitzgerald.

GREENE: Oh. Fitzgerald, okay.

KRETCHMER: What did I say?

GREENE: You said Fitz and I hadn't ever heard of a Fitz, but Fitzgerald, okay. You say he was the bag man. Where was the money coming from? Who was. . . .

KRETCHMER: He wasn't monkeying around. How do I know?

GREENE: And most of it was funneling in through Hatcher? Was anybody else . . .

KRETCHMER: No, we just gave Hatcher money for the black wards. We gave money to the guys in the East Chicago area and Hammond. We had enough for everybody.

GREENE: And it was given without strings? Just that it be given out rather than staying in pockets?

KRETCHMER: To be used. That's all. Sure, and we trusted them and by the time we were ready to give the dough away, we knew who we were dealing with. We could tell from whether the rallies were successful. We had a good sense--and I don't remember a lot of it anymore--but we knew exactly. We had a really good line into those politics at the time. We were having a hell of a time. I mean, sleep was unheard of. We were really working day and night, and it was great. Money was not a problem, I told you. We used to use breakfast in the morning as a great device, and you'd sign the check. And the spirit, when you're in a hustle like that, and you really have all of the freedom of the hustler, it really makes it very easy to function.

GREENE: Were you using money as freely in the white communities as in the black?

KRETCHMER: Sure, in the ethnic communities.

GREENE: Which is pretty much what it was.

KRETCHMER: Yeah, I told you that story about Blumenthal when I was coming in at night once, when this big Jewish lady was for McCarthy.

GREENE: I don't remember that.

KRETCHMER: Oh, yeah. Somebody tipped us to this lady who was for McCarthy. I forgot who it was. We went out and really worked on her and worked on her and worked on her, and I thought we were just terrific. I mean if we were into sleeping with her, we probably could have done that, but we were trying to get her to be for Bobby, and it didn't work. She really gave us a tough time. I mean, she led us along and we wasted a whole night on her to get her there. Somebody's idea that it ought to be done, Wade's or somebody's. I've forgotten now. Maybe Fitzgerald's. The word was out. It's Tuck's [Richard G. Tuck], now that I think about it. Tuck gave us the word that she was important, and it was bad information.

GREENE: Okay. You did say this--I was able to get off that thing--that you were almost totally independent, but that if you had a problem you'd call Doherty, and if you had a worse problem you'd call John Douglas.

KRETCHMER: Douglas, right.

GREENE: What kinds of things would that involve?

KRETCHMER: Scheduling. He was coming; he wasn't coming. I don't know. They really left us along. It was just a question of creating a mood, getting some enthusiasm up, getting the literature distributed, getting workers, making all the rallies work. We had a lot of people who'd come through that we used. I told you that we had FDR, Jr. [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.]. We had a very successful rally within the Polish community. We had Teddy a couple of time. I told you about the argument with Teddy, about, you know. . . . He'd start out by saying he'd do this for his brother now, because maybe next time he would do it for himself.

GREENE: No, I don't remember that at all.

KRETCHMER: Yeah, I called him, and I told him once after he got through that that was a bad, bad speech.

GREENE: Oh, he actually said this to the crowd?

KRETCHMER: He'd say it every time.

GREENE: That he was doing it so that. . . . That was supposed to be humorous?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. We had Joan [Joan Bennett Kennedy] a couple of times, as I remember, at some ladies' teas.

GREENE: Anyway, as far as your area went, when the vote started to come in it was . . .

KRETCHMER: Terrific. Yeah. We won that county pretty good. It's nice. We had a very exciting party that night. I'll never forget that. Marvelous party.

GREENE: You stayed in Gary that night?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. We flew out the next day. We had a big group. By the time we were done, I'll bet you we had two hundred people working. My brother came in from Chicago. We really. . . .

GREENE: The playboy brother?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, that's the only brother I have. There was nothing you could ask anybody to do in the excitement of what was going on that seemed to be past their capacity to do it. I had a guy fly in from Rochester for a couple of days over the weekend, and we had the dough to pay for his airplane ticket. I mean, there was nothing you couldn't do, and there was no reason why you wouldn't ask anybody to do anything, and if you thought it would help you could ask somebody to stand on their head for a couple of hours. That's the kind of energy that we had going.

GREENE: There never was any debate as far as the use of the money? You just used it wherever . . .

KRETCHMER: Oh maybe subtle ones, but I don't remember any. I told you when the campaign was over I had about ten signed checks that I never used. I mean, I didn't steal the money. They trusted us and they figured we had the same interest and we weren't going to throw it away and we were going to try and spend it intelligently.

GREENE: Did you go any place after. . . . You came back to New York right after?

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right. Then I had a primary of my own so I couldn't go any place else.

GREENE: What was the situation in New York?

KRETCHMER: Heavy. Bad. It didn't work out. We were being out-organized by McCarthy people, so we were supposed to go to California for a week and we decided that we would be better staying here in the state.

GREENE: When you say bad, you're talking mainly about your own people, the reformers, or generally?

KRETCHMER: No. Yeah. But the McCarthy people were beating the shit out of us. They were just better organized, they were more motivated, and all that rancor against Kennedy was back in. . . . You know, they were able to capitalize on that, even after the delay. You know, he'd stolen the other guy's thunder; where was he, blah, blah, blah.

GREENE: Was it a situation you think could have been reversed . . .

KRETCHMER: Yeah, right.

GREENE: . . . before the primary?

KRETCHMER: Close, but I think so, if he were to come and campaign. You know, maybe, not without a strong personal effort. That I was really looking forward to.

GREENE: Well, I don't have anything else unless. . . .

KRETCHMER: Okay. Well.

GREENE: . . . you've got something.

KRETCHMER: Nothing.

End of tape