

George Stevens Jr. Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 04/10/1969
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

George Stevens Jr. was the director of the Motion Picture Service of the United States Information Agency from 1962 to 1967. This interview focuses on the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Stevens' friendship with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], and RFK's decision to run for president in 1968, among other topics.

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Address John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Washington, DC 20566

Signature [Handwritten Signature]

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George Stevens Jr. – RFK #1
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Oral History Interview

with

GEORGE STEVENS, JR.

April 10, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta Greene

For the Robert Kennedy Oral History Program of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Would you begin by saying just how you met Robert Kennedy?

STEVENS: I don't remember too clearly the specific moment or occasion because there were many during the first years that I was here in Washington, which started in February of 1962. Those were, you know, fairly business-like meetings at which I was a participant and he was a central figure. And, you know, gradually I came to see him more and more.

GREENE: What kind of meetings would these be? At USIA [United States Information Agency]?

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STEVENS: They were mostly related to USIA. Well, actually, I guess one of the first times I met him was at the noted party in McLean where Arthur Schlesinger ended up in the swimming pool. And then, oh, one Easter.... [Angela] Angie Novello and I were very good friends and I used to go with her. And then the USIA things were usually surrounded around specific incidents or projects.

One was, I had recommended that after the first southern racial crisis — which I guess was Oxford — that that would have been wonderful if that had been a film as, you know,

indicating the concern that the government had, that the President had for the civil rights cause, for showing abroad. And I suggested that if we could anticipate the next one that we would plan and make a film. The company in New York had the same idea, Drew Associates.

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Actually they approached [Donald M.] Don Wilson because he'd been with them at *Time-Life* [*Time*, Incorporated]. I got involved in that. It was one of those long processes of after the film had been made, what everybody thought of it and should it be shown and should these scenes of the President be in it. And they had a screening over at the Attorney General's office. It was a typical Kennedy operation where all the secretaries — judgements were asked from people ranging from secretaries through Cabinet level.

GREENE: What was the conclusion?

STEVENS: That we take out some shots of the President which Bob was concerned, because he looked very — it was the *cinéma vérité* kind of footage — and the President looked very tired and they, of course, you know, were sensitive about that. And also the conclusion was that it wasn't as good a film as

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everyone had hoped it would be. And whenever you get lawyers involved, as there were so many [Nicholas deB.] Katzenbach and [Theodore C.] Sorensen and all the Justice Department guys — they got very technical about what was going on in the film at particular times. So it sort of descended into a not very coherent analysis of it all. It was broadcasted on ABC [American Broadcasting Company] and you know, was a moderately good film.

GREENE: What was the general opinion of the value of this kind of thing?

STEVENS: Well, this was done not for the USIA of course; this was done domestically. And you really can't say this kind of thing; they were very sensitive to the benefits of television, the potential benefits. And this one turned out to be interesting but not exceptional.

GREENE: Was there any discussion then or at another

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time of doing something on another situation of this sort? Actually bringing the cameras in and letting the public see what was going on behind the scenes?

STEVENS: I think this sort of set the cause back for a few months. And I guess this was pretty close to the end of President [John F.] Kennedy's life. So it

didn't... I'm sure it would've come up again as this kind of... My view of it was that reporters had special access to the President's still photographers and that this would be something that should be carried over into film and television, which it now has.

GREENE: What was your impression of Robert Kennedy in this period, during the Administration?

STEVENS: Well, I guess everyone's opinion of him changed through the years. And it's sort of hard to find the points of demarcation of where that

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change took place. One was always very impressed with him from a distance whether one knew him or not. And then people had their own impressions of what his character was based on the distance. And then people would come closer to him and either strengthen their impressions or alter them.

He and I disagreed on certain things which were not of great importance to him. He was, of course, practically assistant President at the time and he was busy. And he was being the tough guy on a lot of issues. So in my relationship with him there was, you know, quite a radical change. I mean, having always respected him, I guess — not feeling that it was entirely mutual at the beginning — and then growing into what became a rather strong and deep friendship.

GREENE: Would you say that your opinion became more so, or actually changed in character?

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STEVENS: No. I had been involved in some of the things, or I had been on the receiving end of some of the things that, you know, characterized him as — the enjoyable word became “ruthless.” Little issues that would come up had come up during the Administration of his brother. You know, when someone's in a position such as he was and if he says something, or if he responds in a certain way to something, a person — I was quite young at the time — could take it, you know, quite seriously. And if one doesn't feel fully appreciated, or if views are rejected in the wrong manner — the word “uptight” wasn't being used then — but one can become uptight. So we had a few of those....

GREENE: Could you be specific?

STEVENS: Yes, two come to mind. One, a minor one, was at a party, a dinner party once at Walter Sohler's. Some issues came up. The

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sisters were very involved in certain aspects of it. [Patricia Kennedy] Pat Lawford was interested in films and so were some of the others. And the issue of what films

went to film festivals was one that came under my job at USIA. And we'd set up a committee to select the films that went to the film festivals and obviously one of the sisters had been to Bob and told him that we were sending dirty films to the film festivals. [Laughter] And at this dinner party he asked me why we were sending *Lolita* to the film festival at Venice, which in fact we weren't because *Lolita*, even though it was made by Americans was a British film and it went as a British film to the festival. He said that he didn't think that particularly represented his brother's Administration. And he said it in terms that we later described as, well, giving

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one "the steely blues." With steely blue eyes he said it. I mean, very minor trivial things but they're the ones that form, you know, a stranger's impression or an outsider's impression. And, you know, this was really one of the inconsequential details because one's overall thing was the admiration in sort of wishing that he had a better understanding of what I was trying to do.

GREENE: But in issues like this in which he really didn't have a direct authority, but had strong feelings, would his views predominate or did *Lolita* go away?

STEVENS: No, no, it wasn't that he really.... No, he wasn't doing anything about it. It was just that he took issue with it in a rather harsh way and so it took on importance to me, not to anyone else.

GREENE: Did you ever discuss this type of encounter with him after you did become closer?

STEVENS: No, not specifically.

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GREENE: But the way he affected people at that time?

STEVENS: No, I think that was just a matter for joking. I mean he knew that his character changed, his role changed. He had been through a tremendous threshold in his life and, you know, his ruthlessness and his toughness were subject to humor among his friends. It was always something that he kidded about or we kidded about. So it never really called for any discussion. And also, his role being the person who would say, "no," you know, or be tough where it was required for his brother. Now he may have, you know, had certain instincts for that kind of duty, but it was hard to know where the instincts and where the need — which governed.... Certainly as he became on his own an important political figure and leader with a great following, his need to perform those functions became lessened and his whole outlook on life and his self-assurance probably changed him. At any rate, it was always a

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subject of considerable fun. And in the campaign, he was just overcoming that as more and more people, particularly the national press, started to understand and realize it.

GREENE: How much interest did he have in your work at USIA? Was he really interested in what the Agency was doing?

STEVENS: He was interested in what everyone was doing. And he was interested in what the government was doing and the USIA was a very important part of it; there were not too many details that he came involved in. The counterinsurgency thing was his big thrust and certain parts of the Agency were involved in that, but I wasn't. And so I knew he headed an interdepartmental group where Don Wilson and [Thomas C.] Tom Sorensen met with him; and he was always pressing for activity and leading the activity in that area.

GREENE: What about the interagency youth committee

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that was formed in which he had a very well, a fairly large role?

STEVENS: Yes, I never got involved in that.

GREENE: You never discussed what they did with him?

STEVENS: No.

GREENE: What about USIA's traditional role as a propaganda...organization, really I guess you could say? How did he feel about that?

STEVENS: Well, I think he felt like, probably as much as he thought about it, he shared the views that those of us who were involved at that time had — [Edward R.] Ed Murrow, most notably, who gave it its direction and philosophy. And that was that propaganda was not a bad word; it's a thing that has to do with, literally, the propagation of information. And, you know, it's how you use it. And we felt that our story was to amplify what the country was about; and that if you could articulate what the country was, then you were

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doing the job and that the net impression would be favorable, that it wasn't necessary to distort. Most people have that, the Hiltlarian.... They associate propaganda with [Adolph] Hitler. And I'd say that he probably shared that view. To follow that philosophy or that view of that work requires that you're very much in tune with the government. And it became increasingly difficult for many of us to do it when we felt perhaps the country wasn't reflecting, or the government wasn't leading the country in the direction, or had politics that we weren't anxious to articulate.

GREENE: Are you speaking now or after the President's death?

STEVENS: Yes.

GREENE: When he came back from Africa in 1966 he commented that the Peace Corps volunteers he met were very disgusted with VOA [Voice of America], that they had chosen instead to listen

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to Radio Peking. Did he discuss this with you at all? And did he feel this was something that had come about only since the assassination, or did he seem to think that was always....

STEVENS: I don't know about that. He was prone to take anything that was going on after the assassination as something that started after it. I don't think the character of VOA changed that much. John Chancellor was running VOA at the time and he and I had become very good friends. After Bob had said that, I one night, I think I remember at dinner, I mentioned it. He at that stage, by that time was the kind of person if you said something like that, he would sort of squint and you know, acknowledge the fact that he may not have complete information, you know. And I said that, I thought he ought to talk with John Chancellor because there were two views to it. And it was not a completely

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simple problem. And that John would also be particularly interested in whatever he found out. And, in fact, I think they did get together. Yes, he and John did talk.

GREENE: You don't know the results?

STEVENS: No, you ask John Chancellor.

GREENE: Okay, I'll make a note of that.
Which USIA people did he seem to have the most confidence in?

STEVENS: Well, the ones he appointed or that his brother appointed. Ed Murrow and he were never.... I don't think they ever got completely on the same wavelength. Murrow had great respect for the President who he didn't support before he was nominated. He found Bobby a bit abrasive but Murrow was also a man of extraordinary character and he just felt probably — he never said it to me — I think there was probably a feeling that Bob was throwing his weight around a bit and was a bit impulsive

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and not as philosophical as he might be. And I think that probably toward the end of that Administration, which was also becoming the end of Ed's life, that they had reached a better understanding of one another.

GREENE: Did Robert Kennedy have reservations about Murrow, too?

STEVENS: I don't know; I wouldn't know. I doubt it. No, I think he probably felt that he was an awfully good man to have on the team. Don Wilson, who worked in the campaign of 1960 and became Deputy Director of USIA, was, of course, respected by Bob. And elsewhere in that Agency I don't know how many people he really knew. I think he had a general question about much of the foreign service; I think he was suspicious of the traditional people. And so I think he liked to find in an agency people who sort of had a bright look in their eyes, who he thought he could, you know, move to action.

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GREENE: What social occasions besides this swimming pool party that you mentioned did you see him at, anything that stands out?

STEVENS: Not particularly, particularly before, say, 1965. I saw him a good deal after. I wrote to him after the assassination and, you know expressed how much President Kennedy had meant to my life and how I felt about his ideas. And I said anything I could do in connection with the [John F.] Kennedy Library or whatever, that I'd like to be a part of it. This interesting quality that he and the President both had is that, you know, two days later, Bob called and said, "I have your letter," — it was a handwritten letter and rather informal — and he said, "I'd like you to help on the Library. I'd like you to work with us on the film aspect of things." Because he had seen a number of the films, I guess, that we made. And so then I started going to the meetings on the forming of the

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Library which....

The meetings have become a blur but one's in his office, one at Teddy's [Edward M. Kennedy] house in Georgetown where we prepared a film showing and a few people were to make presentations. And what we'd done is we'd spliced together the best scenes from different of the color films of President Kennedy's that we made at USIA, and they were really striking moments. And I think most of the Cabinet was there and others and Mrs. Kennedy [Mrs. Aristotle Onassis], Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy. I was supposed to introduce the film. I forget who it was who made the talk, [C.] Douglas Dillon or somebody about the fundraising part of it. And Bobby, again, had that quality that when I got up to make the talk, he said, "George Stevens is going to tell us a little bit about the film and the use of the film possibilities and the Kennedy Library. It will be very short." And that was done with an edge

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of humor. [Laughter] I would say that was probably in the process of transition where those things used to be said, were learned to be said much more lightly later on.

Then they had a meeting at the 21 Club in New York upstairs; a terrific array of fine minds were gathered. Some I'd not seen before, but it would be the Harvard people. And they discussed the whole plan for the Library. And I'm sure everyone has their own reminiscences of that because Bobby ran the meeting and solicited ideas from everybody. He ran it with that kind of, you know, Irish wake humor. And it was not a solemn occasion; it was a serious occasion but it was marked with considerable humor. We were each asked to describe the particular part which we knew best, and I described how the films could be used. This was before [Herbert Marshall] McLuhan and everybody was talking about it. But I

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said it would be a wonderful possibility at the Library; you could actually make it a visual experience and have television screens or rooms where you could have a computer set up. You'd say you're interested in President Kennedy's trip to Mexico and you push A-23 and that film comes up. You're interested in his Cuban missile speech and you push B-29 and that comes up. And I said I think that would bring a lot of people to the Library. And Bobby said, "If you can put his trip to Ireland on, he'll come." So whatever it was, it was said terribly well and with good timing, but, you know, that kind of humor.

GREENE: Did you see him privately at all during this transition period, the months after the assassination?

STEVENS: No. I mean, I probably may have been at the house or something but I think that you really don't see somebody privately like that unless you're awfully close friends. You maybe be alone

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with him, or you may be in a small group, but there's such a sense of the public personality; people know that you may be looking to see how they're behaving. They know they're being observed. And I just wasn't that close a friend. I mean I saw him at the Convention in 1964, and actually this led into the campaign of 1964. I was still at USIA, but he called me and asked if I would — he needed the film for the campaign — and would I give it some thought? Did I have any ideas? And he called from Cape Cod which was in that summer and it was only a short time to get it done. And I said, "Well, what do you want the film to accomplish?" And he said, "I guess to show that I have some experience in government. Maybe we can do something about the carpetbagger problem, and oh yes, the ruthless part." And so that led to me arranging for a film to be made.

I got Charles Guggenheim who had been doing films

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with me at USIA as an independent contractor; he was from St. Louis. And Charles came in and we met with Bob — he was still in the Attorney General’s Office — and talked about what the film could be. And that’s where he was terribly good; he was sure this was the right thing to do, he didn’t have to call in a lot of advisors. I told him how much it would cost and he said, “All right, go ahead.” And then the campaign started and they got their advertising agency in New York. Always the Kennedy chaos because all of a sudden there were people around from St. Louis in the building. They’d taken three rooms in the campaign building; they were on the trips and they were asking to see people; it totally confused the organization. This film company from St. Louis was making a film about a candidate for the Senate in New York, you know. A film company from New York making a film in St. Louis would be more like it.

But the film was finished

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and we showed it just about a week.... It was finished... and this was another thing, we said, “The film can’t be finished more than seven days before voting, or eight days, or nine days.” And everyone was saying, “You need it for a whole month.” And Bob was very quick to understand that you didn’t need the film for a month because what they wanted to do was show it at rallies and that’s not very important. But if you had a terrific film and you had it in time to show it on television, then you don’t want to show it too far in advance; you wanted to save something for the end. And he later said that he really thought.... Everyone said that this film really made the difference in the last week of the campaign. And he saw it and said, “Let’s run it everywhere.” And the ad agency which [Frederic S.] Fred Papert had, had been hostile to the whole process because it was something he wasn’t involved in. And they hadn’t bought

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time for it, you know, reserved time on television. And he said, “Well, get the time.” And they ran it I don’t know how many times in the last week of the campaign.

GREENE: And he himself was very pleased with it?

STEVENS: Yes, he was pleased with it. He knew it was good and it really was a very subtle film. And it started off with all this part about Bobby being raised in New York and “When I walked to school with Bobby, he used to do this and this,” and showed the home in New York where the family lived. And it did it just strong enough — I mean the fact is he was born in New York, well, raised in New York the first few years of his life — without being, you know, heavy-handed or foolish. And because there was a gag in the film later — I mean, which took the edge off of it — where he was talking. And he made a joke about his New York accent, this Glen Cove accent, and it really did; took off those three things

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that he talked about on the phone, the ruthless issue.

It was all designed in showing his personality as a human being, not by saying he wasn't ruthless, but just by capturing those moments that were rather endearing. And the carpetbagger thing about his interest in New York, etc. and his experience and then all of the other gambits that get into political films: Harry Golden saying how great he was and Roger Hilsman saying that in his view — Hilsman being in the State Department during the Cuban missile crisis saying in his view — “We wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for Bob Kennedy.” And it was a very effective film.

Then in 1968, again, I was in this job; I was unable to leave because I just started to work on the campaign. But I brought Charles Guggenheim in, too — as my candidate — to do the film work, all of it, the television and film. Steve [Stephen E. Smith] and I had met on this and agreed on it. And

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then Fred Papert came on very strong and said that he had to do it. So the normal Kennedy solution, “Well, we'll have them both doing it.” And that led to very bloody, you know, disagreements and disputes. And that never really quite got sorted out. And then finally, Charles Guggenheim, the last task was he made the film for the Convention which was shown, the biography which was shown at the Convention and is now, nominated for an Academy Award. It was a very good film. And it had some of the same material from the first film.

GREENE: And the subject was handled about the same way, playing down ruthlessness, and....

STEVENS: Well, no, by this time, we were just making.... It was an emotional film but in the campaign in 1968 before the final biography where everybody knew by the time of the final biography it was really a celebration of him rather than trying to prove anything. But there was a

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mistake when they were making this half-hour film for showing in Indiana and in Oregon; and Edith Green, Congressman from Oregon was in charge of the Oregon campaign. Well, they had a showing here in town. By this time Papert and Guggenheim weren't speaking, and I was in the middle, and some people didn't want me to be at screenings because they knew I was on this side and, you know, all of the hostility. So they had a screening here of the biography film. Well, Guggenheim was making the biography, but the people at the campaign headquarters and Papert set up the screening and somehow Guggenheim didn't come. Papert came and showed the biography, and he just brought the wrong print. And he didn't even know it because we changed the whole biography around and Edith Green had seen this film about this guy who was raised in New York [Laughter] and how the guy's saying, “When Bob and I walked to school.” They don't care if he was raised in New York.

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So all of that had come out of the film by the time he got to Indiana where he was another kind of carpetbagger, because they were arguing because, you know, they had the home-state candidate, [Roger D.] Branigin, favorite son.

GREENE: What other films were made for '68 besides the Indiana?

STEVENS: Just going back to '64. When we showed that film at the Papert office for the first time — I think it was a Friday night, a week and three days before the voting — lots of the family and the friends were there. And one scene in it is a guy from the prep school that Bob went to. What he's saying — he was interviewed — and the big thing he said was how hard he worked and, I think it was the coach or something said that he always made more of an effort and he was willing to try and he had the courage and all that. And he said, "He wasn't really one of the brighter or more talented

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Boys." [Laughter] Bobby, you know, would go "Booo." They got this rather serious moment where everybody's looking at this film to see whether we really need something in the last week to work. And it had that terrific lightness. And [K. LeMoyné] Lem Billings being there and....

GREENE: Was that left in, that portion?

STEVENS: Oh, yes.

GREENE: Going back a little bit to the Administration. Were you involved at all in *The Enemy Within*, the planned filming of that by Budd Schulberg?

STEVENS: It was strangely on the other end. I was still in Hollywood then working with Twentieth Century Fox [Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation], and my office was across the street from Jerry Wald who was the producer. He used to talk about it. He was making trips back and forth here. And I remember one time Jerry Wald was coming back.... He's passed away now, but he was a tremendous publicity-conscious guy, very nice

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man, and constantly talking. But everything he did was calculated for some kind of publicity and that's how some of the movies he made worked so well financially. And he told Stanley Kramer and I...we were having lunch and Jerry Wald came by the table, and he said, "I'm taking the plane at 2 o'clock. I've got to go back to Washington. I'm going to meet with Bob Kennedy about *The Enemy Within*, and I'm going to see the President." And he walked away and Stanley Kramer said, "The President's in for the biggest round of publicity he ever had." [Laughter]

GREENE: Do you know anything about why that film was never produced? Why it was never actually done?

STEVENS: I think that Twentieth Century-Fox got frightened of the gangsters and the labor unions. But I don't know, I mean, John Seigenthaler knows a good deal about it. Budd Schulberg wrote an article in *Playboy*. And recently,

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we've been talking about it, just as something that might be renewed as a project.

GREENE: When you say we, you mean....

STEVENS: [Mrs. Robert F.] Ethel Kenendy and I.

GREENE: Have you done anything actively?

STEVENS: No, I can't do anything right now. And I think it's difficult.... I liked the story. I remember I thought I'd like to make a movie of it before I came back to Washington and before I knew the Kennedys. But those kinds of films are very difficult when they personify an individual and everybody knows that they know the individual better than they're ever going to know the character in the film. And Paul Newman playing Bobby Kennedy is not very convincing. It can be a good movie, but I think it can also be artistically a rather unsatisfactory thing. That was a major episode I went through — one of my major episodes as a peripheral figure in President Kennedy's Administration — the

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PT 109 caper which doesn't involve Bobby at all, so I'm going to pass that.

GREENE: Save it for the JFK tape. It'll be interesting.

STEVENS: Okay.

GREENE: What about *Years of Lightning, Day of Drums*?" You produced that, didn't you?

STEVENS: Yes.

GREENE: How involved did he get in that? Was he very interested?

STEVENS: No. I mean he was probably interested but at that time you just didn't think of showing footage. They assigned Pat Lawford to be the family's contact as far as approving the film and Pat saw it in a rough cut just before it was finished and made some suggestions. Nobody else from the family saw it, nor were they asked to. Well, it was finished a year after the assassination. And he later on — and I don't remember exactly when it was — but he came over one night to USIA and saw it. It was because the bill was before the

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Congress to make it. And he decided that he ought to see it, and he came by himself. I think he came by himself, but [Benjamin C.] Ben Bradlee and [Antoinette Pinchot] Tony Bradlee saw the film and then we went across the street to the Sans Souci and had dinner. And by that time, also, you know, just personally, he was... softening is perhaps not the right word, but...

GREENE: Mellowing?

STEVENS? Mellowing perhaps not either. If softening, then knowing that it doesn't lead to softness. But I was seeing the change in him then. And, you know, he was able to talk about the film.

GREENE: What were his reactions?

STEVENS: Strange, I don't remember. I mean I remember the flavor of his reactions, but I don't remember the details. I mean he was pleased that the film existed. He thought it was a good film and didn't have any criticisms or if he did, they were submerged. I really

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don't remember.

GREENE: Do you have anything to add to what's already been said about his reaction after the assassination and the whole period, the difficulty he had in adjusting to it? Do you have anything that you think would be of interest?

STEVENS: No.

GREENE: Any attempts that you know of that were made to try to snap him out of his melancholy? Did you do anything to try to get him interested in anything?

STEVENS: No, I really wasn't... I was getting to see more of him and didn't feel myself a governing figure on what he was doing. The chronology is, I remember, vague in my mind, but I do remember a specific time. It was in 1965 in July or the last days of June of 1965. I was getting married and there was some... There was a going-away party for me. No, it was a birthday party for Don Wilson we'd had. And the

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night we were going to have a going away party for me, or a couple of nights later, because Liz [Elizabeth G. Stevens] had already gone to London where we were getting married. She had to

be there for a certain amount of days because I was already committed to going to the film festival in Moscow and so we decided that we'd have to get married in Europe.

The David Brinkleys gave a 40th birthday party for Don Wilson and it was outside by the pool and the [W. Averell] Harrimans and Arthur Schlesinger and [Rowland, Jr.] Rowlie Evans and others were there, [Art] Buchwald. And it was a party that didn't quite work. The Kennedy parties, or our group of parties were noted for humor and toasts and everything working. Well they had toasts, but you had to walk around and stand up on the diving board and make the toasts. So everybody was making an effort and Averell Harriman walked around up to the

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diving board and said something. So then it became kind of strained; Bobby wouldn't get up and make a toast. He never liked to be on when it was a bad scene, or when it wasn't working. And so, it was just a strained occasion, slightly strained, nothing very difficult.

After dinner, we were standing beside the pool and Rowlie Evans said, "Why don't we push Arthur in the pool?" And then he grabbed Arthur and he claims that he was kidding. And in one of those blurred events, Arthur was in the pool and trying to find his way to safety. I glanced down at the other end of the pool and Don Wilson was just throwing his head back laughing. And I saw him look at Bobby whom he was standing next to, and Bobby immediately realized the whole dimension of the problem. And Don stopped laughing and Arthur got furious because it was obviously — you know, one doesn't calculate their actions too carefully — but

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obviously he was going to have linkages to a previous episode. And it did. And little squibs in *Time* magazine and all.

GREENE: How do you account for the way you say it didn't work? Was it a poor mixture of people or what?

STEVENS: It doesn't really have any value. It was just that it was a big, spread out party, all the tables around, not a big party, but all the tables were spread around the pool and, you know, nothing having to do with history or human events. It just wasn't a party that was taking off.

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GREENE: I ask because, you know, this whole business of mixing groups with the Kennedys is an interesting question. The President supposedly tried to keep his groups of friends very separate, and Robert Kennedy on the other hand enjoyed mixing them. And I thought perhaps that it was a question of poor grouping.

STEVENS: It may have been that somebody appeared who....

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I think there was an element of that, that somebody came around whom he was not comfortable. But I don't remember who it was.

GREENE: All right, then you say '65 was really the beginning of when you started to get close with him. Why don't you explain how frequent and what kinds of occasions you usually got together with him at that point? How did you start to get closer to him? Was it through your wife, by the way?

STEVENS: I guess, yes, because married couples generally hang around more with married couples. And she and Ethel became good friends. I don't know, we just went to the same places and had the same friends. And perhaps a little bit through the work in the campaign and pet shows and other projects that bring people together.

GREENE: Do you think it was common for people to come in through Ethel rather than through Senator Kennedy? Some people have said that most of

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their social friends were drawn in by Mrs. Kennedy.

STEVENS: Yes, I would say definitely. I mean I'd say whatever my friendship with Bob was really had more to do with Ethel because she really organized things and Ethel determined who was going to be around or whatever. She was a bridge.

GREENE: How did she decide who should be around in certain times? Was she thinking in those terms or just gathered people who she thought would be enjoyable company?

STEVENS: I think she's like the composer. You know, she writes notes and the notes are people and she brings them together. She's interesting, you know, she's such an outer-directed person or I mean, her interests are outside of herself. And then she and Liz became, and are now, you know, awfully close, best friends. You know, just different projects. I guess that's a part of it too, who they

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have and then they ended up liking people, and liked having them around.

GREENE: Did he speak to you very much about his career and his political life? Were you aware of how he was enjoying the Senate in the beginning? Was he adjusting to it? Did you have that type of discussion with him?

STEVENS: That I don't remember.

GREENE: Do you have any idea of how he felt about the Senate?

STEVENS: I would accept what's written. I mean I think that's a pretty accurate reflection and he wasn't the kind of person who would make idle talk, or talk about himself. He'd talk about issues, or how he felt about this, or he'd say how he felt about, you know, the atmosphere, but not, "Gee, I'm not happy here," or "I'm happy here." It was related to specifics.

GREENE: Would you agree that he found the slow process

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of the Senate rather frustrating?

STEVENS: Yes, I mean that I think when he had been exercising such control over things, administrative control, executive control, that he no longer had that so it was a different kind of activity. Although, I don't know that it frustrated him terribly. I think he was going through an unconscious period of adjustment and it gave him more time to think, more time to read, talk to people, learn about things on a less urgent basis, travel.

GREENE: Did he discuss his trips with you at all to Latin America or Africa?

STEVENS: Yes. Mostly again, I find around people who are involved in public life and particularly say someone.... Anything Bobby had to say was usually printed. I never liked to say, "Well, how was the trip to Africa?" You know, you can find out an awful lot about it, so a lot of what you talk about or what you hear becomes anecdotal.

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You know, stories of what went on or a specific feeling. Sometimes there would be specific things that he would pick up that would become almost part of a litany with him; like with the Indian kids and the suicide rate of Indians and things like that which were really a tremendous part of his concern. Sometimes you'd feel he was trying out ideas by talking about them because then you'd hear them later articulated. And by that time, they'd jelled in his mind.

GREENE: When he did throw out these ideas. Did he also seek a response? Was he interested in your feelings on things?

STEVENS: Yes, he was always, not mine but anybody's. He was not someone who enjoyed holding forth. It was always some kind of a ping-pong game, although I found, at least personally, that there was considerable silence in our relationship. Yes, our ideas didn't need a great deal of articulation; you'd get a sense of something.

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GREENE: Did you ever get the feeling that he was questioning — this questioning which has been discussed at great lengths — was more a defensive mechanism not to have to speak himself rather than as a search for answers? If not with you, with people in general? Did you ever get that impression?

STEVENS: I haven't heard that. No, I think it's genuine curiosity. I think that everybody does that to an extent if you get into a situation — you know, the lawyer's technique of asking questions — but I think generally he was curious. You know, he'd meet people, often young people, and say, "Well, what are you doing?" He'd have really inquiring, searching things to ask them. He was interested. I think so.

GREENE: Was he interested in your career, in the film industry and what you were doing yourself?

STEVENS: I don't know. We didn't talk much about what

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I was doing unless it was something specific. And I think that's really why I liked the relationship and that's part of my choice, that it's more interesting for me to talk about, in the case of him, what he was doing and what's going on in the world rather than, working at something all day and then talking about it again at night. He had no peculiar profound interest in what I was doing, no.

GREENE: Who were the people that were around him at this point? I'm speaking now of his Senate years.

STEVENS: When I started the Film Institute [American Film Institute] — it was announced in June of 1967 and there were quite a bit of press. The *New York Times* ran, you know, on successive days several stories. I forget what trouble he'd just been in, but he says, "You're getting more publicity than I am. And I like it that way," [Laughter] or something like

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this. Excuse me?

GREENE: Oh, I had asked you the people that were around him socially at this point. Who was he....

STEVENS: Now, when is this point?

GREENE: Well, during the Senate years, after he'd been elected and prior let's say — let's keep it to prior — to late '67 when he starts to think of the Presidency.

STEVENS: Well, let's see, then just before that to like the Labor Day trip in 1967 where there was the [John H.] Glenns and Andy Williams and his wife, and Rowlie Evans and his wife, and...

GREENE: This is the cruise in Maine, is it?

STEVENS: Yes, and [Joseph P., III] Joe, Jr. — Joe Kennedy — and [Edward A.] Chuck McDermott. I think that was it. I mean those were the people who were becoming good friends, had been. [David L.] Dave Hackett, of course. I mean I think Buchwald was around more and

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more. And then I think after the African trip Sandy Vanocur used to... People would come in, you know; there was no constant thing. Then a thing comes up like the telethon and then that brings a whole group of people who are around together. But the consistent ones during the last year were the Evanses — again, more based on Kay's [Katherine Winton Evans] friendship with Ethel, although Bobby and Rowlie were very close. So often coming close to total separation of powers because of the column. You know, Rowlie would write a column and he'd say, "Too bad, that Kay's an awfully nice girl," — that sort of thing. Because, really, Rowlie could write a... that's a difficult thing because he can write a very damaging column. There was one where his partner [Robert D.S.] Novak had had what was an off-the-record interview. Bob talked to him a lot. Then Novak wrote a column saying that he got the same information elsewhere, so

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he thought that it was all right to write it. And it had to do with Bob saying that the old politicians were dead or didn't count anymore. And Bobby contended, one, that he didn't say that; and two, that the whole conversation was off-the-record. And so that made life difficult with Rowlie for a week or so.

GREENE: How did the telethon originate? Whose idea was it and how did it get started?

STEVENS: Well, they were doing movie benefits every year for Junior Village, and we couldn't find a movie that was clean, didn't have, you know, whatever the criteria was that... *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was one we were going to get. And then they decided that would be considered a Kennedy slap at Dean Rusk because his — was it his daughter was marrying a Negro? Yes. So then we said, "Oh, well, look, forget it."

If we remembered, we'd kill him, whoever first put up the idea that we could do a telethon. And

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then it escalated into this hopeless, fantastic task that preoccupied people's lives for three months — all the people who were basically busy and didn't have time — and, again, threatened to break all friendships. It was just too much.

GREENE: How did you get involved?

STEVENS: Well, because Liz and Buchwald were the chairmen of it. And so I got involved that way.

GREENE: You said that you produced it. Now what's involved in producing something like that?

STEVENS: What's involved is when the women are doing it and then all of a sudden, somebody has to put on the show, that you do it. And what's, you know, just involved in putting on a television show. But it happens that the girls are tremendously well-organized; Ethel and Liz and Kay got this fantastic range of talent, unbelievable. But then my job was just to put them on in some, you know, find something for them to do when

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they were on television. So it was really a community effort. And then again that's where Bobby was so amusing, because they finally had to call it "the blank-a-blank." The goal that these women were thinking of was that telethon and they couldn't mention it — it became a rule that it was not to be mentioned after 6 o'clock — so it became known as "the blank-a-blank." And Bobby would, I remember, call Liz one Sunday morning because she was — I forget what the issue was. And so we went out in the winter, went for a long walk — I think he'd been on *Meet the Press* that day, or one of those things and then issues turned to more important matters — and we went for a long walk and talked about how we could — because some youth group wasn't getting part of the money, an orphanage or.... We should do something about adopting these kids, not just perpetuating Junior Village. And [Mrs. Robert S.] Margie McNamara had felt

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that it was being done wrong and that there were women in town who were saying they'd have no part of it, "It was an outrage and it was...." Bobby, you know, said that the television show was awfully important and he didn't want to equate it with his political career, and that he'd like both to be able to flourish. [Laughter] I remember it was a very busy time. He spent about, you know, two hours and finally had to call Margie McNamara and patch it all up.

GREENE: I don't think I followed what you said about the adoptions? Was anything ever done about that to promote the adoption of these kids?

STEVENS: There's a foster home project here in town and I really forget how it was resolved, but everybody was satisfied. It was not a fundamental issue. The Junior Village has to go on — I mean the kids have to go somewhere; it's not to discourage adoption. So we did both. We made it clear that they could be

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adopted. We'd like to help it. But this particular project was to get a swimming pool for Junior Village.

GREENE: Who besides your wife and Mrs. Buchwald and you mentioned, I think, Mrs. Evans, who else was really doing the work on this? Was Mrs. Kennedy very much involved?

STEVENS: Oh yes. I mean Art Buchwald and... But they'd get all these stars lined up and, you know, as it got closer to the wire, "Jimmy Brown's not coming, so-and-so's coming." And it was unquestionably the biggest lineup of talent ever to appear outside of New York or Hollywood. And then people get asked to do something like that. I knew that they didn't know when Perry Como came, doing a favor for Ethel, that he's going to find out that Andy Williams, [Edwin J.] Eddie Fisher, and ten other guys are also singing. So we had to cope with all those personalities and who gets on first and who gets on last.

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GREENE: Did Senator Kennedy get involved at all except for his very brief appearance? Was he interested in it?

STEVENS: Oh yes. I think he would have liked not to be interested in it, but it so pervaded life there was no way around it. And it was, you know, constantly a subject of discussion. And also because when we decided that one of the great bits on it was — it was Ethel's idea — that Perry Como was going to cut Bobby's hair. And we had decided that and told him about it. He thought we were kidding. And then this worked its way up to whether, "Is Bobby going to let his hair be cut?" It became another major issue for the final week before the telethon, climaxing on the afternoon of the telethon at this luncheon party at Teddy's where Bobby said, 'Of course, I'm not going to let my hair be cut,' all his advisors had told him it was a bad thing, whereas I think he thought

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it really wasn't too bad a thing. But Frank Mankiewicz and others had said, "Absolutely not. There'll be a wire service photo and..." you know. So we had a big negotiation in the backyard

and between Tommy Smothers and Buchwald and Bobby. And finally it was decided that Tommy Smothers would have his haircut if Perry Como could fake cutting Bobby's hair. But Tommy Smother had to have a wig because he didn't want his own hair to be cut. So then Ethel had to find a barber who'd bring a toupee and fit it to Tommy Smothers' head and I think that's how it finally ended up.

GREENE: I don't think I heard that part before.

Let's see. Did he ever at any point discuss with you the possibility of running for President? At what point did he ever discuss this with you before 1967? Was this something that everybody kind of assumed and

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therefore didn't discuss, or did he actually speak frankly about it?

STEVENS: I guess it was sort of an underlying assumption that there was in the cards sometime because of the sensitive nature of it, I never felt that you wanted to verbalize it. Because all he had to do was say — I imagine he had a philosophy about that, too — that you didn't want to say that, that was what was on his mind. And it was an unrealistic choice. And we used to talk about it and Arthur Schlesinger and, you know, "Is it possible in 1968?" And everybody was saying, "It's not possible; it's not even thinkable." And so 1972 was far enough off and I just figured he's in the political business and that's the best job, and so, just assumed that somewhere along the line that was in order. I believe it never was a consuming ambition on his.... That what he woke up thinking about in the morning was

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"How am I going to be President?"

In February, I think it was, he was — I have it here in a chronology — in New York, in 1968; he went to the New York Film Critics' prize-giving thing at Sardi's. It was on a Sunday night, and he passed out the awards to....

GREENE: You're talking now, February, '67, is that right?

STEVENS: '68.

GREENE: Oh, February, '68.

STEVENS: January, maybe. It was after the first of the year. And afterwards the only place you could find for dinner was the St. Regis Bar; Bobby, and John Glenn, and Liz, and Rod Steiger, and Arthur Schlesinger — a group of us ended up there. And I was sitting sort of outside the booth and right next to Bob. And I said, "How are things going?" And he said — there was some sort of mambo jumbo and silence and he says, "You mean, you think I ought to do it?" And I

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said, "Yes, you know that." And he says "Well, it's difficult." And I said something like — he indicated that I might say more — and I said, "Well, as far as I'm concerned, I mean, I think it's this year. This is when it matters, frankly. I think it's not a matter of you, but the country needs it. And something has to happen. And you're the person who can do it." And, I said, "As far as 1972, that's not something I'm thinking about and, you know, maybe there'll be somebody else in 1972, or...."

So he took me up on that and he said, "But, I have a lot of things I can do in life other than be President of the United States. It may sound corny, but I have Ethel and ten children and, you know, I can raise those children. So being President isn't everything to me."

And I really think that was his feeling. I always sensed, you know, as much as that possibility was so much in the forefront of his life, that he really was not consumed....

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BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I

GREENE: Well, you were talking about the period just before he announced, some of the things that were working on him. Anything specific you want to add to what you've said about factors which were particularly important in his decision?

STEVENS: No, I think that they're fairly well reported but I just think that his instincts were to be involved, to go, and it was really like a volcano erupting, personally, when he finally did. Of course, he was not one who functioned well under restraints. A lot of nights we would run movies out at the house. I remember — I think it was the night before the New Hampshire primary, or two nights before — we had seen the 6:30 news at home and they had some [Eugene J.] McCarthy volunteers, volunteers up in New Hampshire saying, "What if Senator Kennedy would've come in the race?"

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They were just... you know, "We used to admire Senator Kennedy, but we don't.... We made our choice and he wasn't there when it counted," and all. We went out to the house — actually there were only four of us, Liz and I and Ethel and Bobby — to see the movie, sat in the drawing room and talked for a minute, a little office kind of green room. And I told him, I said, "Did you see the CBS news?" — or NBC or whatever it was. He said, "No." And he said, "Why?" So I described it. And again that was the great thing about him, you know; he wanted to know what was going on and you didn't hesitate to tell him. And he was sort of silent, but, the acknowledgement that they're right, you know. And he really was ready. But the thing was he had to ask to do it. And this is a terrific sense that the Kennedys have. He realized what the demands were going to be on other people and I imagine he felt it was awfully hard to do something

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like that if Teddy opposed it and if Sorensen and others who were going to have to make, you know, this tremendous effort, if they opposed it. It's not entirely a personal decision.

GREENE: Do you know much about this whole problem with Sorensen and Edward Kennedy? Was that a big question in his mind whether he should go ahead while they were opposed?

STEVENS: I imagine so. I imagine it was the question, not discounting the substance of their advice which was good advice — or I mean intelligent, thoughtful advice — but how personal a decision is it to run for the Presidency when you're going to be dependent upon so many people to get you there?

GREENE: How aware were you of the split among the advisors, who stood where?

STEVENS: I don't know; I imagine comparatively quite aware.

GREENE: How did you see it?

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STEVENS: I saw it.... Well, Arthur and, well, I always pictured Ted Sorensen and Ted Kennedy as being against it. And [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell being first against it and then coming around. And I was really more conscious of the people against it because favoring it, I was more interested in what was the strength of their arguments.

GREENE: What about his young staff, particularly [Adam] Walinsky and [Peter] Edelman? How much of an influence do you think they were on him at this point?

STEVENS: Well, I'm sure if you have them around every day, chafing at the bit, there's some kind of an influence. I don't think they influenced his judgement a great deal in this instance because he knew where they stood. And once you know that one is totally committed, I think he starts to explore the people who are on the middle ground.

GREENE: Who would that be?

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STEVENS: Well, I guess [Frederick G.] Fred Dutton and Burke Marshall.

GREENE: Marshall was kind of in the middle?

STEVENS: I don't know. I was just saying that the people who were not obviously for it. There's a point — like Arthur Schlesinger was obviously for it though he still valued his advice because it had such historical perspective. But Arthur said to me, "I can sit there and tell him to run, but I know that he's not going to do it just on my word. It'd be different if he came to me and said, 'Arthur, I'm going to do whatever you tell me. What should I do?'" That's a harder kind of advice to give but these situations sort of settled down into people advocating the arguments for different sides.

GREENE: What about Mrs. Kennedy? How did she feel?

STEVENS: I think that she always wanted him to do it.

GREENE: When you say always, beginning about when do you think she started to think in real terms?

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STEVENS: 1945. [Laughter] I don't know, when it became a realistic possibility. And I don't know what point in time that was. As far as I knew, it was an unthinkable situation through a certain time with the incumbent President thing. I used to talk a great deal with Arthur Schlesinger and he was saying that it just can't be done. And then there became the point in time where Arthur started saying, "Well, you know, it is possible." When some people started saying, "Well, [Lyndon B.] Johnson may not run," — even though nobody gave much credence to it — it became a discussable issue.

GREENE: Was anyone in the Kennedy group that you know of aware of the meetings that were going on at the White House at this time? Reevaluating the whole Vietnam situation? Had any of that leaked that you know of?

STEVENS: I don't know.

GREENE: Those who were saying it was a possibility

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were kind of just speculating?

STEVENS: That Johnson might not run?

GREENE: Yes.

STEVENS: I'm certain that no one had the slightest hint that he was going to do that. Yes, I mean I remember [William H.] Bill Lawrence, the ABC newsman, he said Johnson wouldn't run. There were those — I'm sure they're wearing their credentials with pride — who were saying it for some time. But the thinking, what

was going on at the White House as I remembered it, was whether they're going to put two hundred thousand more troops in and no one was conscious that there was any way affecting the president's view of whether he's going to run or not.

GREENE: So how did you finally hear for sure that he was going to run?

STEVENS: Ethel called about 8 o'clock.

GREENE: This was what date?

STEVENS: On Friday morning.

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GREENE: The day before.

STEVENS: Or was it Thursday morning? But whatever it was, it had been a back and forth thing, I rather suspected it was going to happen and a question of when, I think. And Ethel called. I think it was Friday morning very early, and it was a big secret, and no one was to be told. And I didn't tell anybody and I was working here, down the street where my previous office was. And I walked out about 3 o'clock harboring my secret. I'd look at the Sunday [*Washington*] *Star*, and it says, "Bobby's told some lady in New Jersey." [Laughter] And then that night, Ethel had planned a dinner party for some time, completely unrelated to this move. And so we went on out to dinner. And then he was back, and there was that mixed bag that you've heard about. He was already in green slacks and a green sweater. Allard Lowenstein was there.

GREENE: Would this be the night before the 15th when

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they were writing the statement, the announcement?

STEVENS: Yes. But I guess you have the list of who was there?

GREENE: Well, we might not have everybody. Why don't you say who you remember.

STEVENS: Well, I remember walking in and I could just sense how pleased he was the decision had been made, that sort of rueful look, you know, about where it's going to lead. Again, at least in our relationship, you didn't say much. You know, you just sort of said, "Great going. Great work," or something. And then he, you know, looked in a certain way that said a great deal. And there was this confusion and the phones ringing and then dinner. Well, the Buchwalds were there. Fred Dutton. It's hard to

remember because so many people came in after dinner. And Arthur Schlesinger walked in, in just total dismay and saw this group,

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and this frivolity that was going on and he finally took me aside and he said, “It just absolutely shows that no campaign manager can run his own campaign.” It’s the same problem, but that was rule number one then, “No candidate should run his own campaign.” And then he started to tell me about Adlai Stevenson. What he said, “This is going to be the same thing all over again.”

[James] Jim Whittaker was there. And they were having a very serious conversation. Sorensen had phoned in the speech, or everybody was phoning in different speeches, and then people split off from the main table and sat over here and were reading the speech. And Jim came over and made a sort of a “Climb the highest mountain because it’s there....” Arthur got infuriated because he thought that this was going to be a debacle of amateurism.

And after dinner was over, we went in the den and discussed the speech specifically. And that was....

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GREENE: Were you involved in that discussion of the speech?

STEVENS: Yes.

GREENE: What do you remember about who contributed what?

STEVENS: Well, Sorensen had a speech and, I guess, Bob was reading it. [William] Bill vanden Heuvel was there and Adam. And Joe Kennedy and Jimmy Boland and Brumus came in and sat on the floor. It was not what one had always envisaged as the man announcing to run for President. Fred Dutton and Lowenstein was sitting there who is McCarthy’s campaign aide or manager. One of the better remarks of the evening was Bob was reading the part about, “I’ve done this and I’ve done that, and I’ve been to Kenya and I’ve been to South Africa and I’ve been to Indonesia and” — wait a minute. No, not so much travels but recounting all of his different experience. “I’ve known this and I’ve known that.” And he said, “I can’t go on saying all of these things,

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everything I’ve known,” and... What’s that?

GREENE: I don’t know. It sounds like someone might be working downstairs.

STEVENS: Is there a head of state being celebrated?

GREENE: Since this is vibrating, it must be in the building. Anyway I don’t think it’s going to interfere, so....

STEVENS: I can't pull the thing together at any rate. All these things he's known, and Ted Sorensen said, "And two McCarthy's," which was sort of a double-edge remark.

GREENE: Do you remember any conflict among the speechwriters as far as whose words were going to be included the most? And whose did Robert Kennedy seem to favor and feel most comfortable with?

STEVENS: He had that way of doing things. I wish I could learn the technique or have the courage to pull it off sometime. But he finally took Walinsky who felt he had the right to be the

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author. Sorensen and Schlesinger, he said, "Why don't you guys pull together something that'll be all right." And he just let them sort it out. I don't know whose words he felt more comfortable with.

GREENE: Do you know if Lowenstein was contributing at all as far as the whole approach to the McCarthy question? Do you remember anything about that?

STEVENS: Yes, he was — not in any way that would contribute any private information — but there was general discussion about, "What are the kids going to think?" And there was issues, and Lowenstein would speak up if he had something to say. Lowenstein, when I met him — I had not met him before — and we talked before dinner. And I guess in response to a what are you doing here kind of look, he shook his head and said, "Well, I'm completely involved in the McCarthy campaign," but, he pointed over to Bob and said,

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"but that man ought to be President of the United States." So he was a confused guy that night.

They advocated the whole range of things. Initially Arthur Schlesinger and Bill vanden Heuvel felt that he shouldn't announce, that he should come out and support McCarthy. I never quite could make the logic gap between Arthur's previous position that he shouldn't run, that he thought it was in terribly bad taste and was bound to create this ruthless image if they were to announce it at that time, then he was mollified as the evening went on.

GREENE: By the nature of the speech?

STEVENS: I think so.

GREENE: Do you think it was more a question of timing as far as the announcement went, rather than whether or not he should actually run?

STEVENS: How he should run. I think Arthur had some idea not running right now and coming together with McCarthy in a favorable position.

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But Bob did not like McCarthy. It became very clear to me that night.

GREENE: What was said that makes you say that?

STEVENS: He said, "I don't like him very much." I said, "Why is it so difficult?" And he said, "I just don't like him very much." And there were certain things in the speech and he'd say, "Do I have to say that?"

GREENE: What about Sorensen?

STEVENS: And I think it was an example of his maturity and his development that throughout that whole campaign that he was a very controlled man. If he had ever been, like in the [James R.] Jimmy Hoffa days, sort of unnecessarily vigorous but in this situation he was controlled and never had any slighting remarks about McCarthy and was able to contain his personal feelings in that regard.

GREENE: How did he feel about the way McCarthy was treating him in the campaign? Do you know?

STEVENS: Yes, I think that's why he didn't like him.

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I didn't agree with him when he first.... I mean, I had no reason to dislike McCarthy. I rather liked his speech for Stevenson in 1960, and it became clear to me what the reasons were later.

GREENE: Actually, I meant later on in the actual campaign during the primaries, when McCarthy was being pretty vitriolic in some of his criticism. Did you speak to Robert Kennedy at all about that?

STEVENS: No.

GREENE: I wanted to ask you about Sorensen. Did he seem to be trying to get in some kind comments about President Johnson? Did he seem at all to be advocating a soft approach?

STEVENS: I wasn't conscious of it. He wrote the original draft. It seemed sensible. Yes, I guess that could have been what maybe Arthur.... No, I don't know if that would relate to what we were talking about earlier, but it just seemed sensible to try to make

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an attempt to make it clear that it was not an anti-Johnson type of thing.

GREENE: What were Robert Kennedy's feelings about Johnson at this time? Do you know?

STEVENS: I don't think that he liked him very much.

GREENE: Do you know anything about the whole feud that hasn't been written and rewritten?

STEVENS: No, not really. I mean it was a subject of his; you know, it pervaded conversations. And again it was done mostly with a light touch, I mean, everyone knew it was different people, different kinds of people with different views, different sensibilities, and the only time where it was really strong or serious was on issues in the war. The one problem was that there were always people coming to him — I've talked with Jack Valenti about this — there were always people coming to President Johnson who were saying, "You know what that little #?% did today?" Or

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what he told so-and-so, and giving him the worst. And Jack used to really try and keep it honest. You know, he'd say, "Where'd you hear that? Are you sure?" Because it's always pleasing to a person, politician, to have someone come and confirm his worst suspicions about an enemy politician. There was a good deal of that going on on the other side where people could come and give the worst of a story to Bobby about Johnson or put words in his mouth that he may or may not have said or was reputed to say. And probably exaggerated the need for disliking him.

GREENE: Some people have said that both the feud with Johnson and the one with McCarthy were almost questions of the myth becoming the reality, that there wasn't really much foundation for them in the beginning but that as, you know, the press and the public elaborated on whatever was the origin of it, it became the truth. And just like you said, they were

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carrying stories back and forth whether that had any foundation or not.

STEVENS: No, I think there was a definite basis, both in terms of philosophy and political rivalry for both of those feuds. So I think that there's a very good basis for it and that it just was exaggerated.

GREENE: What would you say was the basis in Johnson's case?

STEVENS: I think that the war.... First of all, they're political rivals. I think that's enough right there. And then matters of personality and style come into it; that creates resentments. I think it's basic political rivalry. And then policies that, you know, became the most important policies that in Bob's view were taking the country in the wrong direction. And then that adds to it. And then the pettiness that people will trade on becomes the sort of whipped cream on it all.

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GREENE: Do you remember any discussion that night at Hickory Hill about the fact that Robert Kennedy had kind of blown it by almost announcing on television the night before by first saying he was actively reconsidering and then....

STEVENS: Yes, Arthur was outraged about that. They had a meeting in New York and they were on their way to the meeting or something and they found out that he'd already said this thing which there was some feeling that that was unwise. But there again, I think it was just that he knew where he was going and he just had to do it. And I don't think he did it very well. I don't know how he would have done it better. It was just a.... And that's the special quality of him; he really did have the courage to do it when it was unattractive to do and figure he'll pick up the pieces later on.

GREENE: Okay, is there anything else during this whole

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period leading up to the announcement that you think you'd like to speak about?

STEVENS: No, I just would suggest something for your notes. Before I knew him very well, or 1964 when he had gone to see President Johnson about the Vice Presidency, he went to Joe [Joseph] Kraft's house. I don't know if Joe's ever written about it, but I saw him there. He stopped by for a drink, and I stopped by for a drink, and if somebody's interviewing Joe Kraft, they ought to see if he would pin that down.

GREENE: Were you actually present when he spoke to Kraft?

STEVENS: Yes. Well, I came in. They'd been talking before and I didn't really sense the dimensions of it by that conversation.

GREENE: Did you speak to Kraft about it later? Did he tell you the essence of what was said?

STEVENS: I don't remember.

GREENE: Probably added fuel to the fire.

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STEVENS: Oh, yes.

GREENE: Over the Vice Presidency?

STEVENS: Yes.

GREENE: Do you know anything about that that hasn't been said?

STEVENS: No.

GREENE: No. You weren't in that too much at that point. Okay, why don't you tell how you got involved in the '68 campaign, and just what your role was.

STEVENS: Yes, I tell you what. I think we're sort of running out of time.

GREENE: Are you?

STEVENS: Yes.

GREENE: Okay. Do you want to stop now?

STEVENS: Could we?

GREENE: Sure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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