Oral history interviews of the Vietnam Era Oral History Project

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Interviewer

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KH: This is an interview for the Minnesota Historical Society's Minnesota in the Vietnam War Era Oral History Project. It is Friday, April 20, 2018, and I'm here with John Kaul. My name is Kim Heikkila. Today I'll be talking to John about his role in the Eugene McCarthy [Eugene Joseph McCarthy (1916-2005)] presidential campaign and the anti-Vietnam War movement in Mankato [Mankato, MN] and at Mankato State University, or College at the time, where he was a student. So I really appreciate your willingness to do this, John, thank you.

JK: I'm glad people are interested.

KH: So, if you could start, and I know I just said it, but if you could start by just stating and spelling your name.

JK: John Kaul, K-a-u-l.

KH: And where and when were you born?

JK: I was born on January 7, 1947.

KH: Here in Minnesota?

JK: Yeah, Minneapolis.

KH: So you're a Minnesota native. And how do you identify yourself racially or ethnically?

JK: Well, I'm Caucasian. German, French, English and if Ancestry-dot-com is at all accurate, I was surprised to find out that I'm either Greek or Roman in some amount, about 17 percent I guess—

KH: Wow.

JK: or 19. I didn't know that.

KH: Interesting. And, I know, again, I alluded to this in the introduction, but if you could just briefly identify some of the major efforts or organizations or antiwar activities or groups that you were involved in.

JK: Well, the first one was probably the Gene McCarthy campaign in 1968. Do you want me to expand on that?

KH: Not now. We'll get to it. And then, also, while you're at Mankato State. And you were there—you graduated from Mankato State in 1970.

JK: Correct.

KH: And what are you doing now?

JK: I'm a lobbyist, contract lobbyist. I represent Washington County, Hospital Association, a group of radiologists, the Mosquito Control District, and I've got a little contract with the City of Scandia and it's my last year lobbying.

KH: And then what?

JK: Then I'm a filmmaker and in photography and I'm going to call the remainder of my life, a quest for beauty in the world. I'm going to enjoy life in a different way than I have.

KH: And you've been doing the photography and filmmaking all along as well, right?

JK: Yeah, pretty much, you know, with—I've always had some creative activity. It hasn't always been filmmaking or photography but it started with filmmaking and photography and they come back and go out. I did kinetic sculpture; I did oil painting; I did—I've got a garden at my home that is four hundred-fifty feet long. We joke that you can see the Great Wall of China and my garden from outer space. So there's always been some kind of a need for a creative outlet.

KH: All right. So those are the basic set-up kinds of questions and now I'm going to kind of take us back in time and just ask you to tell me a little bit about your family and where you grew up.

JK: I grew up all over the place. My dad was a salesman and he moved around a lot so by the time I was in fourth grade, I don't know, I'd lived in thirteen different places and in third grade I had three different schools. Then we settled down in Bloomington, so I would say Bloomington, Minnesota, was from fourth grade through twelfth grade and all the time I was in college it was my home base.

KH: Okay, so when you traveled around a lot because of your dad's job, was it within Minnesota or out of state?

JK: Minnesota and Wisconsin.

KH: And what industry was he in?

JK: He was selling candy for Brach's Candy Company [Brach's Confections, Oakbrook Terrace, IL] on the road.

KH: Okay. What about your mom?

JK: My mother was a stay-at-home mom. She had seven kids so she didn't have a lot of options until later in life when it came to work.

KH: And where are you in the sibling order?

JK: I'm the oldest.

KH: Oldest of seven. Then do you have brothers and sisters?

JK: I do. I have a brother who's two years younger, Will, and a sister who was born in 1952, Chloe; Dan was born in 1954; Lisa was born in '60; Christopher was born in '61—he died tragically at age fourteen to a drunk driver; and then my sister Fran was born in 1962.

KH: So baby boomers all?

JK: Yeah, all baby boomers.

KH: All right. And did your family, when you were growing up, adhere to any particular political affiliation or beliefs?

JK: My parents were both, at that point in their life, Republicans. My dad was a Goldwater [Barry Morris Goldwater (1909-1998)] Republican in 1964. My mother was not a Goldwater Republican. She did not like Goldwater, but she was raised a Republican. My dad had been raised by Democratic, Roosevelt Democrats, but all of his brothers went into sales and business and they all went, with all the social pressures of being in business, and they're all Republicans, although many of them changed. So I grew up in a house that was Republican.

KH: Was that something that your family talked about—?

JK: Yes.

KH: about political issues of the day? So, you knew—

JK: With my mother, especially.

KH: Why more your mom?

JK: Well, my dad was—at that point in his life, kind of aloof and distant and troubled. So we just didn't—we didn't talk as much. That changed later, but my mother was always interested and hungry to talk about things. She had all these child responsibilities, but she wanted some adult activity so she read, followed current events and she liked to talk about that stuff.

KH: Was she involved in civic or community—

JK: Somewhat.

KH: organizations?

JK: Yeah, somewhat.

KH: Some kind of outlet?

JK: Yeah.

KH: Do something outside the house.

JK: Not a great deal with seven kids, but she kept an oar in the water.

KH: How would you have described your family's class status?

JK: Middle class, solid, middle, middle class. I don't know how they fed seven kids and she, you know, kept them in shoes, much less clothes, but they did.

KH: What about religion? Where does religion—?

JK: Roman Catholic dad, Methodist mother, which meant I went to parochial school for three years and they were telling me my mother was going to go to hell because she was a Methodist. So it was at that point in fourth grade that I was hearing that and a lot of the other propaganda that I became an agnostic because I knew my mother wasn't going to go to hell because she wasn't a member of the club.

KH: And so you became an agnostic. What about your family as a whole? Did you go to one church, I mean—?

JK: We did. We went to St. Richard's [St. Richard's Catholic Church, 7540 Penn Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN] where the priest was a pedophile. He took me up to his cabin when I was in fourth grade and fortunately did not attempt to molest me at that age. But he invited me back up with I was eighteen and did attempt to put the moves on me but was unsuccessful because he was no match for me in my physical condition at the time.

KH: Because you were eighteen by that time?

JK: Yeah, and I had—I was not terribly sexually experienced at eighteen but I knew what I liked and he did not have it.

KH: So he was rebuffed.

JK: He was rightly rebuffed and I told my dad and my dad was quite shocked by it. We went and saw the monsignor and he got the same treatment all the other pedophiles got; they moved him into different positions ultimately. And he'd already been moved out by the time he made that attempt on me. He'd already started down the road.

KH: So people knew about this guy?

JK: Yeah.

KH: At least whoever was moving him around?

JK: Yeah, they knew. The corruption of the hierarchy of the church, yeah.

KH: And so what high school did you go to?

JK: Bloomington High School, which doesn't exist anymore because you have Kennedy [Bloomington Kennedy High School, Bloomington, MN] and Lincoln [Bloomington Lincoln High School, Bloomington MN]. And Bloomington High School became a Control Data [former Control Data Corporation, Minneapolis, MN] facility and now it's a community center.

KH: Okay. And before we get to your graduation and moving on, was there a tradition of military service in your family—dads, uncles, mom, aunts?

JK: I guess there was. My dad was in the military and then he got—he'd been in a terrible car accident when he was nineteen and he probably barely got in. He was in a coma for seven days; went through a windshield; was found in a cornfield by a doctor driving into town and he recovered from that. But he was—he was in a very minor way physically impaired by that and then he got spinal meningitis and so he was given an honorable discharge.

His brother, identical twin brother, flew in the Pacific in World War II and my uncle Dick, on the other side of the family, my mother's side of the family, also flew in the Pacific in World War II. Yeah, there was—my aunt Sis's husband was, when he retired, was a lieutenant colonel in the army and had been active in India, fighting, in World War II, I forget—Burma Road.

KH: Okay, and was that—all of these men who served in the military—was that an important characteristic of your family? Was it something your family members talked about?

JK: It's interesting. My uncle Jim who is just—he's what I, to steal a phrase, he's an extraordinary ordinary American. He downplays everything he did. He'd never brag about it and the only reason I know anything about it is I did an interview like this with him ten years ago and got him to talk about it. And I did the same with my uncle Dick and he told me things he'd never

told his kids. My uncle Dick had a little shrine in the basement. It was full of photographs of him standing in front of his plane with his leather cap on. He was proud of his military service but he didn't go around boasting it. I don't think he was like active in the Veterans of Foreign Wars or anything like that. He wasn't a tub-thumping flag-waver. None of my family were like that.

KH: Do you know, had they all been drafted?

JK: I think they volunteered.

KH: Okay, in part—many did.

JK: Yeah. I mean, it was the Great War, the Second Great War, Great War number two. Or actually World War I, Part II.

KH: Right. So how would you describe growing up in Bloomington in post-World War II America / Minnesota? What was life like for you as a kid?

JK: Like Wonderbread. Everyone was white; I don't remember anybody—if there was an accent there might have been someone from the south. I remember listening to WCCO radio and the Boone and Erickson's [Charlie Boone and Roger Erickson] of that time, and they were telling these Scandinavian jokes and I wouldn't have known there was that culture at all if I hadn't heard it on the radio.

KH: And that was Scandinavian?

JK: At St. Richard's, where I went to parochial school, there was one black child and so that was quite a phenomenon. And the most exciting thing in Bloomington was my twelfth grade English teacher, Medora Pearlman was her name at the time, now Medora Woods, and she was Jewish from New York. She had an extremely well-stocked mind and I remember thinking when I was in her class that when I grew up, I wanted to be like her in the sense that I wanted to be—to have read a lot of books and to have had a lot of experience because I wanted a well-stocked mind like she had. That's Jungian, I guess, a Jungian role model.

And she and I are still good friends. We have lunch every year and it's coming up to that time—she was only four or five years older than all of us. She was also—drove a fire engine red Chevrolet Impala, a convertible, and she was hot as hell. (laughter)

KH: That's a good picture of this woman. So what year did you graduate from high school?

JK: Sixty-five.

KH: Sixty-five. So when you're—even from your early or late elementary years through junior high and high school, the civil rights movement is picking up visibility and steam. Was that something you were aware of?

JK: Very much so. I remember ’62 or ’63, just seeing the coverage on television of these young black children being blasted with firehoses and police dogs and being beaten and just washed down the street with the force of those firehoses. And it really, it outraged me even—that would have been like tenth, grade, eleventh grade, twelfth grade—and in Bloomington at that time, I think, almost everybody felt the same way. It was—it seemed to me that people were less divided. You know, Eisenhower [US President Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower (1890-1969)] was the president; when he said something, people believed it. Polls at that time showed that 80 percent of people had faith in the federal government. So I think that most people in Bloomington at that time were offended by what they saw.

KH: Of the civil rights movement.

JK: Of the way—the treatment of the blacks.

KH: Okay, so they were offended—

JK: At least the people I knew were. They weren’t talking about it so much but I probably just—I’ve always had a natural inclination towards the underdog anyway. It’s just part of my makeup. I think that’s because I have learning disabilities, dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder, diagnosed when I was fifty-two years old and it made me a lousy student and so there were self-esteem issues connected with that. That’s why I always thought of myself as kind of struggling. So I always identified with other people that had to struggle, I think.

KH: And so you were just describing this post-war faith in government that, you know, they do good on our behalf perhaps, and then being offended by what you’re seeing on TV with the hoses aimed at these kids. Is—does the offense come in because your faith in the government is now being challenged or—what’s the connection?

JK: Actually, no. The offense was that those redneck crackers, racist southerners, I won’t use the expletive that you’d have to extract from the [transcript]—but you get the picture. I was just enraged at those nasty, mean redneck racists. And the federal government, actually—you know, Eisenhower sent in the troops. Kennedy [US President John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy (1917-1963)] sent in the troops—so the federal government, as far as I was concerned, was doing what they should. I thought that the redneck racists were an anomaly of the south, that that was an ugly, rotten, stinky tradition of a different, a region of the country that was very backward.

KH: So, still at that point, as you say, Eisenhower sends troops into Little Rock [Little Rock, AR] and Kennedy in various places—that, for you, was the federal government acting righteously, appropriately?

JK: I was proud to be an American because two presidents—I mean it wasn’t easy for Eisenhower. He didn’t really want to do it. He was more of a states’ righter, but he believed the constitution dictated he had to do it. And Kennedy was worried politically about losing the south but he did it.

KH: Now, were those things, you know, those politics behind Eisenhower's and Kennedy's response to the civil rights movement, were those things that you were aware of at the time? Were you talking about these things in school or were you just reading the papers? How were you developing this consciousness?

JK: Well, I think that—I'm filling in a lot of blanks that I didn't, couldn't have filled in back then. When Eisenhower sent the troops into Mississippi or Alabama, it wasn't that I knew that he—about his reluctance to do that. I just saw him act. And when Kennedy sent the troops, I didn't know just how troubled he was about the implications of it. So that's something I learned later.

KH: So one of the other kind of hallmarks of this postwar period in American life is the fervent and fervor of the anti-communist campaign. Was that part of your consciousness as a kid growing up?

JK: Yes, it was. One of my earliest recollections of television—I lived in Madison, Wisconsin. The Army-McCarthy [Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1908-1957)] trials were within '53 or '54—I think it was '54.

KH: Yeah.

JK: And so in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1954, they didn't have television in the morning or it would be turned on when people were coming home and it was news and evening programs. But when the Army-McCarthy hearings were on, we had television during the day. And I remember—'54—I would have been—I don't remember what time of the year it was—I would have been seven. I remember my mother ironing and me watching the McCarthy hearings with her. And I remember I didn't—I know a lot about Joseph Welsh [Joseph Nye Welch (1890-1960)] now because of the reading I've done since then. I remember McCarthy's ugly face; his ugly demeanor; his ugly style and tactics—I think that left an impression on me and I knew he was wrong.

KH: Even at seven?

JK: Yeah, well, my mother was also offended by him so—but I probably should give her a lot of credit for that. But I remember that. And then I remember programs on TV like, *I Led Three Lives* [*I Led Three Lives* (TV Series 1953–1956)]—you're familiar with that?

KH: Yes.

JK: Yeah.

KH: They're among us.

JK: Yeah, yeah (laughter). And then, of course, Kennedy ran in 1960 as an anti-communist with a rather—a lot of testosterone there about the Commies and Russia. I remember there was a

public service announcement on television trying to recruit people to go spend weekends with binoculars looking for Soviet bombers. That's how old I am.

KH: Do you remember during that time—

JK: Duck and cover.

KH: yes, duck and cover, *Bert the Turtle*. I don't know if—

JK: We don't remember–*Bert the Turtle*--but duck and cover exercises in classrooms.

KH: Okay, and do you remember feeling afraid?

JK: Yeah, I remember feeling afraid.

KH: In the middle of that?

JK: Still afraid, especially with the madman at the helm that we have now, but—[someone comes in—brief exchange]. So I remember being afraid, I remember being afraid many times about that.

KH: Do you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis?

JK: Clearly I remember. I was with my uncle Dick who'd been the World War II pilot and I often would work at his shop; and in '62, I would have been fifteen. I was probably sweeping the floors and he was driving me home and we had to make a few stops on the way home and I remember listening—he left the radio on and it was when Kennedy was making a statement about the missiles in Cuba, announcing the fact that they were there. And I remember that like it was yesterday and the tension that followed.

KH: Yeah, that was—

JK: And the fallout shelter sales that boomed after that. And all the, you know, federal buildings and state buildings with fallout shelters and food in them.

KH: Now, coming from a family that was at least Catholic to some degree and whatever reservations you had from early on, was John Kennedy's candidacy and presidency as a Catholic important to your and/or your family?

JK: That's interesting. My dad voted for Nixon [US President Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994)]. He was the Catholic. My mother voted for Nixon. I remember staying up all night. This was really a telling sign that should have told me about the rest of my life. On November 2, 1960, I stayed up till like three or four or five in the morning at age thirteen or whatever. Thirteen, watching the returns and I remember feeling really conflicted about it. And then Kennedy became president and I was really drawn in by his ability to muster and organize the

English language. He just had such a gift for historical anecdote and imagery and that's when I'm sure I became unconsciously a Democrat. And then when he was assassinated—yeah.

KH: Where were you when he was killed?

JK: I was in class and a kid named John Kennedy came up to me and told me that John Kennedy had been shot. And I went to my classroom and that was confirmed—he was dead. Yeah, high school.

KH: How did that affect you as a high school student?

JK: It was very troubling. There was quite a myth that grew out of it—he died when his stock was trading really high and Jackie did such a marvelous job, creating the Camelot thing, so it was a very romantic, powerful influence. I talked about my twelfth grade English teacher having a profound effect on what I wanted be like, and John Kennedy was somebody I'm sure I modeled myself on in terms of my interest in reading and history. Getting into politics, I'm sure, has some subconscious origins in all of that.

KH: And were you aware—I assume you were, but I'll ask—aware of and drawn in by his call to service?

JK: Yeah, I didn't go on a fifty-mile hike, but I still resonate to the idea that democracy is some kind of a romantic idea and that citizens need to, in some way, serve a democracy whether it be being well enough informed to vote, which is certainly a shortfall these days, or volunteering your time to various causes, going into the military, being a teacher, environmental causes. I mean, I think everybody should—the world should be, if nothing else, not worse because you were born. You should try to make a contribution to make it better.

KH: Had you ever considered the military?

JK: Well, I did for a few seconds when I was rejected by this woman I was deeply infatuated with who sat next to me in Introduction to Musical Literature, but it didn't last long.

KH: High school or college?

JK: College. (laughter) Go off to the Foreign Legion.

KH: Talk about romance of a sort, right? So you graduate in 1965. So just that spring in March, the marines are sent to Vietnam.

JK: Right, well, they'd already been—there were up to sixteen hundred Americans in Vietnam early in the Kennedy administration and in Eisenhower's time, was it eight hundred or some? I don't know what the number is, but—

KH: Yeah, I think what? By the time Kennedy takes office or when he takes office, there are three thousand advisors. By the time he leaves, there's sixteen thousand. So do you remember that as part of the Kennedy years, about any—

JK: No.

KH: Conversations about Vietnam?

JK: You know, it's hard to know what I remember because I've done so much reading, but I don't recall—I mean, he talked about Laos and there was Diem's [Ngô Đình Diệm (1901-1963)] assassination, although no one was really talking about how Kennedy might have been involved in that. Kennedy talked about the threat, the domino theory. He bought into the domino theory. I remember that.

KH: But when you graduate in '65, so the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—

JK: I remember that.

KH: Kennedy's gone; Johnson [US President Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973)] is in. We have the whole Tonkin Gulf. You do remember the Tonkin Gulf affair?

JK: I remember that affair and at that time I was inclined to believe it.

KH: Believe the official account of the two attacks?

JK: Why wouldn't I? The government didn't lie to us as far as we knew.

KH: So you were still in that—many people were still—

JK: Sure.

KH: well, they're our leaders and we should invest our trust in them.

JK: Yeah, trust, yeah.

KH: So the marines are sent in in March of 1965 so now we're getting involved in the ground war that we'll be involved in for the next eight years. Tell me a little bit about your growing consciousness of the war in Vietnam.

JK: Well, first of all, I think I was just born as a doubter. I mean, I talked about how I bought into the Gulf of Tonkin and trusted government but I'm also someone that questioned B.S., you know, like the Catholic church. So as I got closer to draft age and I had to consider whether or not I was going to end up in the military fighting over there, I was asking myself, Is that a cause worth dying for? And, I had some real questions about that, even before a lot of the revelations came out later on about it. And I didn't also like the idea of being powerless. So if you go into

the military and you've got people telling you what to do all the time and you have to follow orders whether you believe in them or not.

And this is one thing that I think is really an important thing to mention with me, another one of the important formative events in my life was Adolph Eichmann's [Otto Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962)] trial in 1960 I think it was. I was thirteen and Adolph Eichmann was being tried for killing six hundred thousand Jews and he was saying—his defense was that he was following orders. And that really stuck in my craw and it made me ashamed of my German surname, Kaul.

And I can't overestimate how important that trial was in my thinking—that it isn't my country, right or wrong; it's not a good defense to say you were following orders. So carry forward, maybe to 1965, '66—I think it was '67 that I remember starting to read books. I read Arthur Schlesinger's [Arthur Meier Schlesinger Jr. (1917-2007)] *The Bitter Heritage* [*The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1966,* Fawcett Publications, 1968], which is a short little book that talked about the tradition, the culture, how this was a battle against colonialism a lot more than it was about communism. And so, I remember arguing with my two-years-younger brother, Will, about that. And he was taking the hard line, you know, American line and I was questioning and arguing the other side of it.

And then '68, by 1968, the first thing I can remember is that—so '67, because I was hot and bothered in early 1968, and McCarthy [Eugene Joseph McCarthy (1916-2005)] announced. I remember seeing McCarthy and Humphrey [US Vice President Hubert Horatio Humphrey Jr. (1911-1978)] at an event right before McCarthy announced. Then he announced and I was with him.

KH: Right away?

JK: Right away. I regretted I hadn't gone to New Hampshire, although I had no money or way to do it. So one day in probably January, I got a call from a fellow named Scott Dickman, who was from Mankato but by that time was at the university going to school. But he came down there to organize the caucuses for McCarthy. He called me up, someone—I don't know if I knew him before then or not—and he said, "Would you like to organize the eighth precinct in Mankato?" And I said, "Sure. How do you do it?" He said, "You call every Democrat that we have names for and you tell them you're doing a poll and you ask them who they're supporting for president and if they say they're for Johnson, say thanks. If they say they're for McCarthy, tell them about the precinct caucuses." So I did that and the biggest turnout in all the precincts in Mankato was the eighth precinct, which I organized. Which was partly due to my ambition and energy but also was where all the professors and students lived so it was kind of like shooting fish in a barrel.

And so we had that precinct caucus and there was like eighty people there and there'd never been eighty people at a precinct caucus—the biggest turnout had been like thirty in the Keith [Alexander MacDonald "Sandy" Keith (1928-)]/Rolvaag [MN Governor Karl Fritjof Rolvaag (1913-1990)] split [in 1966.] So the whole town of Mankato went big for McCarthy and I remember I was a delegate to the county convention, but not to the state convention that year. I went to the state two years later. But I went from there and I worked and volunteered in

Wisconsin for the Wisconsin primary. And it was coming back from working in Onalaska, Wisconsin, on March 31, that I sat down in the living room to hear the speech and there was Johnson announcing he was pulling out. That was shocking.

KH: Yeah, so say a little bit—I mean, right? Part of, as I understand it, part of the impetus behind the McCarthy campaign and Concerned Democrats whether across the country or here in Minnesota was to Dump Johnson, you know, let's get rid of him. He's prolonging the war; he's making a mess and now he's out. So what is your immediate reaction to that news?

JK: Well, I thought it was just great that we'd driven him out. I was happy. Things got more complicated pretty quick. So, I remember talking to Walter Mondale [US Vice President Walter Frederick "Fritz" Mondale (1928-)]. He was on the television program [that commenced immediately after Johnson's announcement]—he was on with someone else, I forget who he said he was with—and they were supposed to do an analysis of the president's statement and they had no clue what he was going to say. And so Mondale's having to describe—so Mondale ends up being the Humphrey co-chair with Fred Harris [US Senator Fred Roy Harris (1930-)] for Hubert Humphrey. [Ironically, Mondale's Senate] seatmate was Bobby Kennedy [US Senator Robert Francis Kennedy (1925-1968)] and his Senate colleague was Eugene McCarthy.

So, anyway, that's a little bit of a digression. [After that] I went to Indiana—then the other thing that is really big is that Bobby Kennedy got in and that really irritated the hell out of the McCarthy-ites because we thought that was just naked opportunism. He had told McCarthy he wasn't going to run and then when he saw the opportunity, he changed his mind so we almost thought he was as bad as Lyndon Johnson and Humbert Humphrey for doing that.

And so then I went to Indiana and I was—I had the vaunted title of being on McCarthy's national staff and I think I got paid fifteen bucks a week or something. I worked in the West Indianapolis headquarters and I cursed the fact that the day before Paul Newman [Paul Leonard Newman (1925-2008)] had been there to open the headquarters. I wanted to see him—him above anything else. So we opened the West Indianapolis headquarters and we worked really hard and the suburbs were good to McCarthy but the state went to Bobby Kennedy because of Gary, Indiana and big population centers.

KH: And so that—the Indiana primaries were shortly after Martin Luther King [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)] was assassinated, right?

JK: Right.

KH: Really close. Isn't it—and Bobby Kennedy is in Indianapolis as everybody's getting the news.

JK: Right, and he did that wonderfully courageous speech that kept Gary or Indianapolis, yeah, it was in Indianapolis, kept it quiet. No, I think he was in Memphis [Memphis, TN] wasn't he?

KH: I think it was Indianapolis.

JK: Okay, anyway, it was just an incredible speech and a great credit to who he was. It was hard for me to admit that at the time, but because of the ruthlessness of the decision. So we organized—it was near the Speedway [Indianapolis Motor Speedway, 4790 West 16th Street, Indianapolis, IN]. I remember Estes Kefauver's [US Representative Carey Estes Kefauver (1903-1963)] daughter came in and my job was to drive her around to suburban coffee klatches to talk to suburban women.

I remember I ran into Ted Kennedy [US Senator Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy (1932-2009)] at the airport when I flew home and I had a big McCarthy button on and he was not unfriendly, but he wasn't overly happy to see me, either.

KH: Yeah, I guess. (laughter)

JK: So that was a great experience. I dropped out of school that quarter to do that.

KH: Okay, so you had been—did you go to Mankato State right away after you graduated?

JK: From high school.

KH: From high school?

JK: Yeah.

KH: So fall of '65. And why Mankato and what were you studying?

JK: Well, I was a lousy student in school and I figured that the only way I was going to ever get through college was with smaller class sizes and I could befriend teachers so they would take pity on me and give me decent grades. And it worked. (laughter)

KH: Strategic thinking.

JK: Yeah.

KH: Good. And what were you studying? What was your major?

JK: Well, I ended up in political science and history.

KH: Okay. And so I'm going to come back to the McCarthy piece here but I want to get a little bit of understanding of what's going on with you at Mankato State leading up to '68. So '65, you said, you took a whole year off school?

JK: No, just that quarter.

KH: Just a quarter, the spring of '68. So prior to that then, while you're at Mankato State, what are you hearing, thinking about the war or, you know, what's going on at Mankato State?

JK: Well, we had some good professors down there, especially Scott Shrewsbury and Carolyn [Carolyn Shrewsbury], but Scott was a very big influence in my life. He was my political science instructor and kind of a mentor for me. There was a campus minister, Episcopalian, Timothy Hallett [The Reverend Timothy J. Hallett], who was part of a little group of ours. Peter Meyersohn, a sociology prof. We would sit around at one of their homes; we might be playing Scrabble or we might just be shooting the breeze and we're talking about these issues. And it was with those people that we organized stuff politically. So there was a cell of antiwar activists that kept in touch and were somewhat savvy about how the system worked.

KH: And was that limited do you think mostly to the campus, to the college? Was Mankato as a whole—?

JK: Well, you know, it was—most students were pretty indifferent to it all. It was a cadre of people who cared, not—I always used to say that students don't care about anything, not even apathy. (laughter)

KH: And, of course, you, while a student, had a deferment.

JK: I did.

KH: So the draft wasn't—?

JK: But that gets into—that's another interesting story. I had a deferment. It was a legitimate deferment and sometime in 1969 or '70, I got an induction notice even though I was at the time married; I had a child; I was in school. And someone at the registrar's office did not send my transcripts to the draft board or something so I got this induction notice and I had to show up for a physical. So I got a hold of the draft—whoever it was—and I said, You know, I've got a legitimate draft deferment. And they said, Well—and I proved it to them and they said, Okay, but you still have to come in for the physical. So I went down to the federal courthouse and I had the physical and everyone else there that day that passed the physical got on a train and left. And it was at that point that I decided, I ain't going to go.

And that's when I met with Tim Hallett, who was the campus minister. Well, he knew I was—I told him I was going to go for CO [Conscientious Objector (CO)] and he said, Well, maybe I can help you, you know, because you've got to make your case along—it has to be based on religious training and belief and you've got to be opposed to all war and totally anti-violent. So he and I studied the issue and when I went up to my draft board, he drove up with me and sat outside the room. And five days before my hearing before the draft board, I got my lottery number, 306 or 307. A hundred and eighty was as high as they went on the draft, so I went into that hearing at the draft board with a cool confidence of a Christian with five aces. So they're asking me these questions and they asked me about World War II and I said, Well, that's hypothetical to me. I wasn't even born then, which was an automatic, You're going in the military.

KH: Right, right.

JK: Anyway, at the end of the grilling on all these questions, they said to me, What's your lottery number? And I said it's 306 and I said, When I got it five days ago, I had to decide whether I was going to go ahead with this and I decided that if I was a conscientious objector before I got my 306 lottery number, I probably should be one afterwards. Well, they gave me a unanimous decision. I'm a conscientious objector.

KH: Because, in part, because you could have just—

JK: Only because I had a 306 lottery number because I did not answer the questions right. They asked me, I had to base it on religious training and belief and so I had gone to parochial school and, you know, I said, "I was told to lead a Christ-like life and I can't imagine Jesus Christ slogging through a rice paddy with an M16, killing people."

KH: That didn't sell them on—

JK: Because more people have been killed in the name of Jesus than just about anything throughout history.

KH: And the Catholic church right at that point isn't clearly steering one way or the other. I mean, there's the Catholic left and all that—

JK: Oh, yeah, yeah.

KH: but there's also the conservative—

JK: Oh, yeah, probably predominantly much more conservative than, yeah—this is an interesting side. I told you I was raised a Republican. When I was at St. Richard's, I think it was in fourth grade, 1956, that I wrote on a paper, "I Like Ike." The nuns chastised me because Catholics were Democrats in those days. And everyone else was for Kennedy; I remember that. No, in '56 they were for Adlai Stevenson [Adlai Ewing Stevenson II (1900-1965)].

KH: How interesting.

JK: That's how I got my CO.

KH: Okay, so I'm going to—but that's after—clearly after the '68 election—

JK: Correct.

KH: and McCarthy and all of that. So I want to go back to the McCarthy campaign a little bit. What—and I think we talked on the phone about this a couple months ago maybe and you said that you eventually met him personally but it was long after?

JK: I saw him a lot. I was involved in Democratic politics from '67 on so I would see him but I didn't ever meet him. But I remember being in—one of the fantasies that I started having in

1968 in Indiana was—he was just such a fascinating character. We all knew he was staying up late and reading poetry with Robert Bly [Robert Bly (1926-)] while we were working hard, but we didn't care. Wouldn't it be fun to have a long lunch with Gene McCarthy someday? And so, if this is the time for me to tell that story—

KH: Sure.

JK: My boss, who was an Irish Catholic guy, Nicholas Coleman [Nicholas David Coleman (1925-1981)], was the Senate majority leader here from 1973 till 1981, January, and I was his—they call them today, Chief of Staff. It was a much less glamorous title, it was Administrative Assistant back in the seventies, and when Nick was—this was his last year—he was diagnosed with acute leukemia and he was at a hospital at the university and McCarthy had communicated to the family that he wanted to come and visit Nick, his old buddy. And so they asked me if I would go pick him up at the airport, which, of course, I said yes and I greeted him at the airport.

And I said, "I'm John Kaul. I worked on your campaign in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Indiana and I have had this fantasy ever since then of taking you to lunch." And he said, "Well, I'll check with my sister and if I haven't got anything going, sure." So we went to the Lexington [The Lexington, 1096 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN] and had a three-hour lunch, he and I. It was like this, only I was you. I asked him questions for three hours nonstop. I wish I would have had a recorder.

It was just—he was talking about Lyndon Johnson and he really had contempt for him and he admitted his contempt, at least in one respect, was due to the fact that Lyndon Johnson dangled the vice presidency in front of him and Ladybird [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson (1912-2007)] told Gene McCarthy that he was Lyndon's choice and he went to Humphrey and he felt like he'd been played for a fool; so he was pretty bitter about that.

KH: And what year was this that you—?

JK: That would have been either late '80 or early '81. I can't remember exactly.

KH: Okay.

JK: And, you know, I guess I've got a curious mind and I do remember right after the convention, he did a bunch of things that I questioned at the time that didn't fit with the way I was feeling. So I said, "If you don't mind me asking you," I said, "after the Democratic National Convention, which was awful and all of your supporters are getting beaten up and all that, you first went off to the French Riviera for a much deserved vacation and then you covered the World Series for *Time* [*Time*, 1923-Present]—was it or *Look* [*Look*, 1937-1971] or *Life* [*Life,* 1883-1972 and 1978-2000] I forget. And then you waited a long time to endorse Humphrey and, you know, I'm wondering if you think the timing of that was good. And then you went off the Foreign Relations Committee and Gale McGee [US Senator Gale William McGee (1915-1992)], a hawk from Wyoming took your place and then, you stepped down from the Senate and Humphrey ran and now is back, you know, in the Senate." He would have been dead by then, but, "So I'm just wondering what you were thinking?"

He said, "Well, yeah, I did deserve some time on the Riviera. It was—I campaigned hard. I've always loved baseball. I was on the Foreign Relations Committee for many years. What good did it do? So I went onto Government Op where they actually made decisions that had some impact. When it came to endorsing Humphrey, I waited until I thought my supporters would accept it. I didn't want to do it a minute sooner than I thought it would be something they would accept. And I left the Senate because I thought it was time to do something else. And, besides, you have to understand that the reason I ran for the presidency was to sell my poetry." (laughter) Which is his wit.

KH: So he told you that he waited to endorse Humphrey because he thought his supporters—?

JK: Weren't ready for it. He waited until he thought they were ready.

KH: Meaning that then they would also vote for Humphrey because he endorsed him?

JK: Yeah, he wanted Humphrey to defeat Nixon, I believe, and not very much, but he didn't want Nixon so he was trying to assess when the right time to do it would be.

KH: So if he—if his concern was if he would have done it earlier, then what would have happened? How would his supporters have reacted?

JK: His supporters might have felt betrayed—that he'd sold out.

KH: So he wanted to make sure that he retained some sort of relationship or—

JK: With his followers. He didn't want to disillusion his followers.

KH: Okay.

JK: And I also think equally important was he wasn't ready to endorse Humphrey until he did, which, I don't recall him saying that, but I'm sure that was probably the case.

KH: And it seemed, well, not that this is any great insight, but it seems to me that Minnesota was in a really unique position in the '68 campaign because it had, you know, these two kind of lions of the party squaring off for the Democratic nomination.

JK: Yeah, we were really right on the bullseye.

KH: Yeah, so you can you just kind of describe the tone and tenor of Democratic politics in Minnesota during 1968?

JK: Well, in Mankato, the old guard was just really honked off. We came in—they were the precinct chairs; they were older people that had established patterns; they did the work of precinct chairmen. We threw them all out and then we didn't [perform any of the duties] that precinct caucus chairmen did. There was no apparatus there. Tom Kelm [Thomas Kelm (1930-

2004)] was the second district chairman in '68 and he was 100 percent Humphrey and everything. Of course, outside of Mankato, Humphrey, I think, in the rural areas, Humphrey held his ground so—

I remember, this is interesting, too, I was working on the Jon Wefald [Jon Michael Wefald (1937-)] campaign for congress that year against Ancher Nelsen [Ancher Nelsen (1904-1992)]. I was his campaign coordinator and because of that, they gave my wife a job in the second district DFL office, all of which was funded by Tom Kelm, by various means. And so it was really nice to have that extra income because we were really dirt poor.

And then the Democratic Convention came and I'm Wefald's campaign coordinator and I was driving around someplace that night with the campaign and I was going to listen to the radio and I heard the descriptions of my people being beaten by the Chicago police. I just really came unglued. I resigned from the campaign. I wrote a letter to the editor as the chairman of the Young Democratic Famer Labor Party saying that—I've got it here somewhere—and I basically said, "If Humphrey does not renounce the Gestapo tactics of Mayor Daley [Richard Joseph Daley (1902-1976)], the fruits of his victory will be but ashes in his mouth." So I got a call from Tom Kelm real quick after that. He asked me if I thought it was a good idea with my wife working at the office and he read me the riot act. I don't regret what I did.

KH: So you were here in Minnesota?

JK: I was in Mankato.

KH: In Mankato during the—

JK: The old second district down there. Yeah, so I left the campaign and just—I do remember on election night wanting Humphrey very badly to win because I didn't want Nixon. I remember staying up all night.

KH: And forgive me if this—I'm going to ask you two questions, the answers to which may seem obvious but they aren't always so I'm going to ask you to explicitly address them. One of which is why was McCarthy your guy?

JK: Well, he performed a terrific service to America by having the courage to run against a sitting Democratic president and raise issues about the legitimacy of the war and that was the most important thing to me. I think also, you go back to those union prototypes. He was erudite, witty, heroic—he was anti-hero, though, really. He didn't—he appealed to people by not being your typical managed politician. So in all those ways—to listen to him talk was like listening to the best professor at Harvard [Harvard University, Cambridge, MA]. He was so articulate and so well-read and he could draw upon these really arcane historical anecdotes or poetry or biblical admonitions. I mean, he just had it all at his disposal. He was really a cool, cool poise, resolute, matter-of-fact debonair.

KH: What do you think, if any, were his weaknesses as a candidate?

JK: Well, he—it would be unfair to describe him as lazy during the run for the presidency, but he was lazy in the context of other presidential aspirants. He spent a lot of time, I think, doing poetry with Robert Bly and socializing with people he was comfortable with. And he was not willing to play the game, which actually was admirable, but—

KH: So the things that made him both appealing to you, were also liabilities in some ways.

JK: Yeah. You've got to remember he had a really good civil rights record, I think, but he—he had a funny thing with some of those southerners on a couple of issues but Kennedy was the first choice out of ninety-nine out of one hundred African-Americans in Indiana and I remember a group of us went to, deciding to try to cut into that a little bit. A bunch of people from the West Indianapolis headquarters went into downtown Indianapolis and went to Garfield Baptist Church [now Garfield Park Baptist Church, 1061 East Southern Avenue, Indianapolis, IN] in the middle of a black area and I remember being—my motives were cynical in the sense that it was just to get the votes. But I remember being so moved by the service and there was this young black woman that sang; her voice was like Leontyne Price [Mary Violet Leontyne Price (1927-)], or I don't know what it was like, just gorgeous. And I remember leaving, kind of humbled and kind of upset with myself for being so cynical in the beginning about, you know, I thought—it was an interesting experience. It didn't make any difference because Bobby Kennedy had a corner on that market.

KH: Now when you interviewed Walter Mondale later—

JK: A couple of times—

KH: after the fact—

JK: Three or four times by now.

KH: And I think it must have been on the video you sent me, the link, you asked Mondale if he thought that McCarthy had a mean streak.

JK: Yeah.

KH: Why? Where does that question come from?

JK: Well, because he did. He could cut people to pieces with his tongue and do it humorously, but I remember the—when he got older, he got more curmudgeonly and I remember my friend Gary DeCramer [Gary Michael DeCramer (1944-2012)], who was a legislator who ended up at the Humphrey Institute [Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN], had invited McCarthy to talk to his class and he spent a lot of time lacerating Walter Mondale which really upset—I was not there, but Gary was telling about it.

And I don't think Mondale deserved that. I think that he's a very admirable man. He's made a few mistakes, like he stayed with the war longer than he should have, but he was the first person

to admit it and he's a person who gives—and so my question to him was, "I was up at St. John's. I heard your eulogy to Gene McCarthy. It was very eloquent and really well done," and somewhere in there I think I said, "You were a hell of a lot kinder to him than he was to you." And Mondale said, after a pregnant pause, "You know, I'm not going to go there, and the fact is that Gene McCarthy," and I just said it myself, I stole his words, "he performed an invaluable service to this country by questioning the war. I think that he gave young people hope and I think the war ended earlier than it would have otherwise because of his courage." So Mondale wouldn't say—he must have known about that, but Mondale's a classy guy.

You know, and then McCarthy did some weird things like he started to kind of imitate Harold Stassen [Harold Edward Stassen (1907-2001)] by running for the presidency after his moment had come and he endorsed Reagan [US President Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911-2004)] in one of those races so there was some peculiar behavior there. But I choose to focus on what he did before he got pretty old.

KH: Now you said a few minutes ago that it may have been during the Kennedy administration when you started shifting, or at least started seeing yourself perhaps as a Democrat rather than the Republican tradition that was in your family.

JK: Yeah, you know when I discovered I was a Democrat?

KH: No, that's my question.

JK: Okay. It's 1967 and I got this prof named Professor Pahl [Thomas L. Pahl (1932-2008)], P-a-h-l, and he was state and local government class and he said one of things you had to do for that class to get a grade was to put in twenty hours of time. You can do it for Democrats, Republicans, but you had to get involved in some kind of campaign or political activity, League of Women Voters, didn't matter. You had to do it. So I had to choose. What the hell was I going to do? Was I going to be a Republican or a Democrat? Well, my high school counselor, who I was very close to, Jack Tesmer [John Arlo '(Jack)' Tesmer (1933-2015)] was involved in the Democratic Party so I figured he'd be a good person to call, that's a good way to—so that's how I got involved in my first campaign. It was John Thomasberg [John Alfred Thomasberg (1928-1997)], who ran for the mayor of Bloomington on a civil rights platform and got elected. And that's when I came out of the closet as a Democrat, in that campaign. Not that he ran as a Democrat, but it was all Democrats supporting him. It was a nonpartisan office.

KH: So when you come out as a Democrat then, as a result of this class exercise that you had to do, what, if anything was the response of your family?

JK: Well, my mother by that time, was moving in the same direction. My dad and her had gone through a divorce and they were—let's see, by that time, well, they weren't divorced yet but it was—that was a period of high stress. They got divorced in '69, '70, but my dad was quite distant and remote. I remember when, in 1970, when I went for the CO, even though he had moved out, he made a point of coming and finding me and taking me out for a drive and we parked out by the airport and he told me what a bad idea it was to go after a conscientious objector status and how it was going to affect me the rest of my life; I would have a hard time

getting jobs. It was a bad thing to do it was like that's what—he didn't say it but it was like, it's not something he'd be proud of his son if he went and became a conscientious objector.

KH: So you think that was more the motivation rather than a genuine concern that this may negatively impact your future?

JK: Well, I think it was both. I mean, I think he was worried about my future but it was both. You know, he came out of a tradition that you serve.

KH: What about your siblings? Where did they fall?

JK: So my brother was—I think by that time my brother had come to my thinking by '70 and was against the war. Then you get to the kids that are in high school and probably not that—and my next—Chloe didn't have to worry because she was a girl and Dan was too young to give it a thought and then they were all younger than that. So it was—yeah.

KH: Now, during this time, both in high school and in college, granted, everybody else with you in high school and college had deferments, but did you know people from Bloomington, neighborhood friends, other peers, who were in fact being drafted or who were serving in Vietnam or coming back? Did you have any contact with people who were—?

JK: Well, after I left high school, I didn't really have any contact with hardly anybody in high school so it was people in college that were disappearing. I remember there was this—I was never a frat because I'm not a frat type—but I kind of got involved on the periphery of some of the parties and there was this young guy from Iowa—rich family, funeral home, and he drank too much beer and he got drafted and he was one of these guys that all the girls swooned over. He went over to Vietnam and it wasn't a month that he's—a rocket comes in and blows him to smithereens. And there's a lot of people in my graduating class that I didn't know very well that died over there. But it was on everyone's mind. It was certainly something that was, you know, the fear of being drafted into a war you didn't believe in and then dying for nothing really preoccupied my thinking all the time.

KH: So that leads me to my second question that may have an obvious answer but I'm asking everybody. What was it about the war in Vietnam that you opposed?

JK: Boy, you know, it's been overlaid by so much reading since then, but I think first and foremost, it was—to me it was not a justified use of force. It was not a war worth me spilling my blood in. I just didn't buy into it.

KH: You didn't buy into the domino theory, the—?

JK: No. I think when I read *The Bitter Heritage*, I saw it—again, I have the benefit of all these years of really intense reading about all this stuff, but I know I read *The Bitter Heritage* in '67 and I think that's where I concluded this is a colonial war; this isn't a war about communism.

KH: So you weren't a pacifist per se?

JK: That's the irony of it all. I'm not a pacifist. I thought that when the World Trade Center was attacked that we should have gone into Afghanistan and taken out Osama bin Laden [Usama ibn Mohammed ibn Awad ibn Ladin aka Osama bin Laden (1957-2011)]. I did not think that we should go into Iraq and George Bush [US President George Walker Bush (1946-)]—the only good thing that ever happened to George Bush is that Trump [US President Donald John Trump (1946-)] has now made him the second worst president. He had no historical underpinnings; he had no knowledge of the cultures, the traditions, nothing. And so now we're engaged in a two-thousand-year struggle if we don't get vaporized by Trump.

KH: No lessons learned from the Vietnam war right?

JK: Nothing learned. It's like they said of the Bourbon Dynasty [House of Bourbon, France, 1272], they've learned nothing and they've forgotten nothing they've learned. (laughter)

KH: Okay. So, back to the McCarthy campaign for a little bit. I think the—kind of the predominant image of McCarthy supporters and campaign workers was this Clean for Gene, Get Clean for Gene—like these clean-cut college students who found his intellect appealing, as you're describing, as opposed to some of these supposed long-haired hippie radical troublemaker yippie kind of people. But I talked to Mary Vogel [Mary Vogel (1940-)] a couple weeks ago about all of this and one of the points she made was that the other thing about the McCarthy campaign was that it gave a home and a place for a lot of other people to join the antiwar movement who weren't either of those things—who were not necessarily the students and not necessarily the long-haired hippie radicals. And she was talking about, you know, mothers and families and middle class people.

JK: That's what I saw in Indiana, at least, probably Republican women or Independents and Republicans that really liked McCarthy and were worried about the war. What Scott Shrewsbury once said, my prof that was a mentor and an inspiration to me, that the Democratic Party was a party of war. It was also a party of peace. Republican Party was a party of war.

And so what happened is that—and this is really an important historical fact. The McCarthy campaign—I mean the war just ripped the Democratic Party apart but it brought in so many people and I think you saw it in a lot of places but Minnesota in 1971 the Republicans had been in control of the legislature since 1858 here, the Senate. The Democrats had won a few times in the House. In 1970 election, it became thirty-three to thirty-three with one guy that said he'd caucus with the majority. In the 1972 election, the Democrats went up to thirty-eight and I think you need, what? [Thirty four] is the majority. In 1976, they went up to forty-nine and that was all people that came into the Democratic Party. It was like this massive infusion of young people that came in so it did bring in all kinds of people. After it ripped it to pieces, it brought in and the Democratic hold on this state lasted really from 1973 until 2010 in the Senate. That's how long Democrats held control of the Senate here.

KH: So, when you're talking about this influx of people into the Democratic Party in Minnesota as a result of the war, do you think or have a sense of—were a lot of those people

coming in through the McCarthy wing of it, the Humphrey wing or by that time was the distinction not as important?

JK: Well, it was still important back then and I think certainly in the metropolitan area my guess would be that most of those people were McCarthy activists, but there were young people getting elected all over the state. Russ Stanton [Russell P. Stanton (1949-)] was twenty-one or -two years old; Bob Vanasek [Robert E. "Bob" Vanasek (1949-)], future speaker, was in his early twenties; Roger Moe [Roger Moe (1944-)] was twenty-six; Wayne Olhoft [Wayne Olhoft (1951-)] was twenty-one or two. Not all of them were McCarthy-ites but it was a time when there was this massive influx of people into the party in the metro and the suburbs. It was probably antiwar activists for the most part I think. I don't know—I can't say I've done a study but if you look at the people in the legislature—Bob Tennessen [Robert J. Tennessen (1939-)], he was certainly a lefty—I mean an antiwar type, not a lefty, but if I had a list in front of me I could tell you what their proclivities were because I was here in 1971.

KH: Did you and your peers who were working on the McCarthy campaign, did you think he stood a chance to get the nomination and if so, then win the election?

JK: I think so, although I think I would have done it anyway. I mean, because it was the right thing to do, to challenge a policy that was wrong.

KH: Now his comment to you many years later notwithstanding, about getting into it to sell his poetry, do you think that he also entered it with the idea that he was going to—?

JK: I think that was part of his Catholic world view. He'd make judgments. He'd look at the facts, almost like Dietrich Bonhoeffer's [Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)] essay on freedom. You weigh things, look at all relevant facts and then you make a judgment and you stick with it. And I think McCarthy—when he made his statement about poetry I took that as just Irish wit. I think he was very sincere and it was a very principled thing that he did through and through.

KH: So that idea about, you know, making judgements, looking at things rationally and then making judgments and the description that you and many others have offered up of him as very intellectual and very—one of the other things that Mary said was that McCarthy had a really a deep skill at explaining what was going on in Vietnam and why it was wrong. Do you think that that kind of rational judgement-based campaign—I mean, we can look back and say, Well, we know his campaign wasn't effective. He didn't win the nomination, but do you think that is an effective way to appeal to voters—

JK: Well, you know—

KH: whether or not it should be?

JK: I'm having a really hard time after this last election in having a lot of confidence in the American public's judgment about anything. But, if you think about it a little bit further, and I've been a lifelong Democrat, it's like—almost like the Sears Department Store [Sears, Roebuck and Company, Hoffman Estates, IL] enterprise. We don't have much appeal; we don't have much

message; we don't have a good sales force and we've been closing our stores for years and we need some new blood.

I spent an hour on the phone with Arne Carlson [MN Governor Arne Helge Carlson (1934-)] this morning. He's eighty-three years old. He should be the person who puts together the message for the Democrats today because he's much better than they are— than we are, because I'm one of them, too. Democrats are—Republicans are frightening; they're mean-spirited; they're short-sighted; they have a versatility of conviction that takes your breath away because all they want is power. They're against the national debt when the Democrats are in power and they're for it now. When Romney Care was created it was good; when Obama Care came along it was bad. I don't know if they have a set of beliefs except that they're against abortion and most of them don't like gays.

But the Democrats are just effete and ineffective and the only thing that gives me hope is that, you know, Kennedy came out of nowhere; Carter [US President James Earl Carter Jr. (1924-)] came out of nowhere; Obama [US President Barack Hussein Obama II (1961-)] came out of nowhere. I hope that the presidential campaign candidate for the Democrats is someone whose name is not mentioned frequently today in the next election. Joe Biden [US Vice President Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. (1942-)] is too old. It would be nice if there was some woman who had an edge and a skill with words.

KH: So do you think that the way you're describing politics today in the United States and Minnesota, the differences between Democrats and Republicans, do you think those same kinds of distinctions and issues held in 1968?

JK: No. In 1968, if you look at the Minnesota legislature for example, who was the person who offered the bill creating the Pollution Control Agency? Gordon Rosenmeier [Gordon Rosenmeier (1907-1989)]. He was a Republican from Little Falls [Little Falls, MN]. Who created the metropolitan government? It was a Republican named Wayne Popham [Wayne Popham, (1929-)]. And so the Fiscal Disparities Act [1971] that distributed tax revenue from businesses around so that everybody could realize a dividend of the productivity of development at this spot? It was Republicans. Who was one of the key players in the Minnesota Miracle in 1971? Stanley Holmquist [Stanley Willard Holmquist, Sr. (1907-2003)], a Republican from Grove City [Grove City, MN]. He did the right thing. In 1971, one of the legislators advocated for like an eight hundred, around eight hundred million dollar tax increase to equalize funding for school districts and lower property taxes—it was the equivalent of a four billion dollar tax increase today—the Republicans were only willing to go five hundred and fifty million. Today, they'd want to cut five hundred and fifty million out of education. So Republicans in those days really played a constructive role.

The Democrats might have wanted to spend too much in too many areas at once, of course. Republicans took the punch bowl away from the party before it got out of control but they wanted to make the state better; they wanted to invest in education. It was Republicans who were in charge of the legislature when the Baby Boomers came of age in schools and they gave them good schools and they gave teachers fair pay. The Republican Party today is not what—it's not the Republican Party that—it's the Tea Party; it's the Trump Party.

KH: So it's not the Republican Party even perhaps that your—at least your mother would have—

JK: No, no, no, no, no. You know, Arne Carlson was a Republican.

KH: Right.

JK: He still is. It's just that his party has left him. He doesn't want to be part of the Tea Party movement.

KH: Well, all right. I'm going to shift gears here a little bit—

JK: All right.

KH: and get back to Mankato State.

JK: All right.

KH: But one final question about McCarthy. If he had won the nomination, do you think he would have won the election? I know some people argue that, you know, polls were showing he had a stronger lead over Nixon than Humphrey had.

JK: I think he had a shot at it. The trouble the Democrats had—the Democratic Convention was so chaotic and it left a bad taste in people's mouth about, Are these people really going to be able to govern the country? They had the assassinations and they were Democrats who were assassinated so people were leery, I think, about the Democratic Party as kind of the party of chaos and instability. But then Gene McCarthy was so calm, cool and collected. Nixon's dirty tricks—I don't know if that would have worked on McCarthy. He was awfully cool. I think he would have had a shot at it. Humphrey was a hell of a salesman, though. If the campaign would have gone two more days he would have won, maybe even one more day. He had the momentum.

KH: So, after the election—Nixon wins. Campaign is done. Then what? What do you do? Where are you? What are you doing?

JK: It's 1968, November, I'm in college. I got married; I didn't have a child yet. That was on April 29, 1969, my daughter was born. I got married too young and I was—my wife and I really weren't fit to spend our lives together so there were some tensions there. I was working in my grandfather's shop on weekends to make money for college and to put food on the table. And I was just kind of a mind to get out of college. It took me until—I went—it took me five years—I was not an aggressive student.

KH: Well, and you took some time off, right?

JK: Yeah.

KH: So do you remember in the fall of '69, so you would have had what? A six-month-old baby so you were—and you're still in school and, you know, understandably, occupied elsewhere. But the fall of '69 we have the Moratorium—the events in both October and November nationwide and in D.C. we have the Nixon Silent Majority speech. Were you part of any of that?

JK: I wasn't part of any of that until the spring of 1970.

KH: Until after Cambodia and Kent State?

JK: Kent State, Cambodia, yeah. One thing that I—here's a couple things that I remember. The thing I remember the most vividly and I don't remember which came first, is that I was sitting around with some of my young Democratic friends in the student union and we're hearing about it. It was after Kent State—all these campuses are lighting up and I said, "We ought to do something here." So in a couple minutes I said, "Let's make up some posters." I don't know if I made the posters up and put on let's say, "Tomorrow at one o'clock we're going to gather." I was on the upper campus in kind of that commons area and Brian Wells [Brian W. Wells], who not long after that—he got a little bit too caught up in the antiwar movement and he, sometime in '71 or '72, burned down the St. Peter [St. Peter, MN] draft board. I wasn't a part of that. That was not my style of politics. He ended up in the slammer for that.

But Brian rented a megaphone from audio-visual and went up on top of Highland Arena and was announcing that we're going to have this antiwar rally and so lo and behold, two thousand people showed up. Now I'm not someone who had a lot of experience with crowd control. We had a little stand out there and we must have had a mic and people started getting up and giving speeches and then this element from the Twin Cities came down and they were SDS'ers and they—my intention was to give people an opportunity to talk about the war and after a fashion, disperse.

Well, the group decided they wanted to do more than that. They wanted to go on a march. Well, I was okay with that but I was worried about public safety and believe it or not, here I am, 1970, twenty-three years old, and I felt some responsibility for sending two thousand people from the upper campus down into the city with all the traffic. So I saw the marchers coming and I sneaked away from the rally and I went into the union and I called the chief of police and I said, "We're going to march through the town, and I think it would be a lot safer for everybody if we had a police escort than it would be if we surprised you." So the police show up on Val Imm Drive, turn around out of there, trying to lead us through town.

So the more militant group were saying, Fuck the, you know, screw the police and they kept trying to divert the group off—

KH: So it was you calling the police escort?

JK: Me, yeah, because I wanted it to be peaceful and I also thought that a march, the purpose of the march, should be to try to win people over and so why be obnoxious or troublesome or

destroy property and so it was a tactic—it was the tactician in me that wanted to win people over. But this group, the militant group they started chanting, "One, two, three, four, we don't want your fucking war," as we went through residential neighborhoods and that was not my style either. And I never had long hair. My thought was if you want to carry the day you have to carry people with you.

But we had a successful march, marched all the way to the high school and back. It was a long march and a lot of people participated and so—but that was a surprise. You put up some posters and you get a megaphone and two thousand people show up. It was a warm spring day, half the people were there because they had an excuse to skip classes.

KH: So how was this—and there were several days of events, right? I mean, 1970 is the student strike across the country—

JK: That was the big day. There were events after that. There was also a semi-popular teacher named Barclay Kuhn [C. Barclay Kuhn]. Do you remember—has anybody talked about that?

KH: A bit. Nobody's talked about it but I've read—

JK: Well, he was a pot-smoking prof who would have kids over to his place and smoke pot and he had very unconventional style and his grading was not based entirely on tests that would look at what you learned in a class because all he did was talk without any structure. But in those days, that was pretty saleable; a lot of kids liked him but a lot of the professors didn't like him and the administration didn't like him so they decided not to give him tenure. And so there was this big uprising on campus and I was involved in that and I guess I was one of the leaders in that because I was selected as one of the—actually there was an occupation of the president's office and all that. I was one of three students that was selected to negotiate with the administration on it. They just kept talking to us until the school year ended and then it was over and it was a good thing they won (laughter) because he wasn't really, you know, he was not someone that—it was not a hill to die on. He was not necessarily an admirable person.

KH: And who in the administration were you talking to?

JK: Jim Nickerson [James F. Nickerson (1911-2009)], the president.

KH: So all the way—?

JK: Yeah, not always, but he was there.

KH: Tell me a little bit about—because I've been reading his book, *Out of Chaos* [*Out of Chaos: Reflections of a University President and his Contemporaries on Vietnam-Era Unrest in Mankato and its Relevance Today*, 2006] you know, and reading a lot by and about him.

JK: He was kind of a cool guy. I liked him; respected him.

KH: It seems like he, from what I've been reading anyway, was pretty effective at keeping the peace and preserving students' rights to protest, to do what they needed—and it sounds like—was he against the war himself?

JK: Probably. I don't recall him saying much about it but he was an enlightened guy. I liked him. It was kind of fun to meet with the president. It felt like kind of a big deal. I do remember negotiating until school got out and then, well, no point in negotiating any more. (laughter)

KH: There's some strategy there I guess.

JK: Yeah, it worked good. But then they—I think the next year they came up with a bunch of stuff that was very—they created a learning, living center where professors and students lived together and they did reach out to that group of students that I was a part of, that cohort, and they did try to—they tried to figure out ways to talk to us and not be our enemy.

KH: So one of the other things I was reading about at Mankato State at that time was that, in the mid to late sixties, it was changing as an institution. It was moving away from becoming strictly a regional college and attracting students from across the state and maybe even out of state, including African-American students. Do you remember what the racial demographics or dynamics were?

JK: Slim to none by the time I left in 1970.

KH: Okay.

JK: There were some, but I remember hitchhiking up Val Imm Drive and getting picked up by a couple of African-American students and thinking what a neat experience it was to talk to African-Americans.

KH: Because—?

JK: Because it just didn't happen.

KH: Okay.

JK: Yeah, and wish I had more experiences like that. Because it was like I said, you know, ethnics were Sven and Ole jokes where I grew up. (laughter)

KH: So, as I understand it, during this period in May of 1970, among the other protest events that were occurring, there was a mock Vietnamese village that was built and burned. Do you remember that?

JK: Yeah, I don't think I was a part of that. A lot of times I had to work because I was working at the Kahler Hotel [Kahler's Inn Towne Motel on highway 169, north of Mankato] down there to support my family by then. By 1970, you know, I had a young daughter. I do remember going on a march down the main drag in Mankato in 1970 with Rachel on my

shoulder and I was—there was a picture on the front page of the *Free Press* [*The Free Press*, Mankato, MN] with—and she must have been just old enough to be able to hold herself up without, you know, support. So she was on my shoulder.

KH: Do you have that photo?

JK: I couldn't find it. I wish I could. I should go to through the Mankato archives and find it. I'd love to have it.

KH: Yeah, so that would have been—

JK: Spring of '70, yeah. Because she would have been like fourteen months old or something by then.

KH: What about burning effigies, Nixon and Agnew [US Vice President Spiro Theodore "Ted" Agnew (1918-1996)]—do you remember anything?

JK: Well, there was that kind of stuff going on. Again, to my way of thinking, imprinting on Kennedy, I wanted my team to win and I did not think that those were tactics designed to—burning flags isn't the way you bring people into the fold so in that sense, I was pretty traditional.

KH: So we talked a little bit about the slow trickle in, perhaps, of African-American students onto campus but it seems like, and maybe I'm wrong, so I'm going to ask, there was a pretty strong presence of Vietnam veterans on campus.

JK: There was. Have you talked to any of those guys?

KH: I just talked to Dean Doyscher and we're going to an interview.

JK: Okay. Bill Strusinski?

KH: I have not.

JK: Well, he's a must.

KH: Okay.

JK: He was one of the organizers, and Barry Tilley. Those two guys were the key players in the Vietnam Vets. Bill Strusinski—I saw him today. He was here.

KH: Oh, okay. He's around.

JK: He's in the lobbyist handbook. I probably have his contact—although it's changed. He's moved to Scandia but I'm sure I have his phone number somewhere. He would be a premier

person to talk to. So would Barry Tilley, T-i-l-l-e-y. He lives out in Eagan [Eagan, MN]. They were the kingpins of that organization.

KH: And so what do you think their veterans' role was in mobilizing antiwar sentiment on campus, or in Mankato in general?

JK: Well, I don't know if they were mobilizing. I think they were just being—it was more of a support group I think, as I recall. But you should talk to them because my memories of exactly what they did are in the ethernet somewhere.

KH: Now do you remember at the time talking to Vietnam veterans, hearing stories about what they had experienced in Vietnam?

JK: What I remember once is I had this old military shirt that I was wearing and I went to some kind of a bar or something and I'd sit. And where it said the name of the general I put "General Chaos" on it and some vet was offended by that. He wanted to punch me out. So, my group didn't mix much. If they were a bunch—if there were people there that were really pro-war, they didn't say much or do much as I recall. It was the people that were against the war that were visible. And I think the people that came back from Vietnam were either suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress, or, you know, they more likely needed to talk to each other and be with each other and, be supportive for one another.

Have you ever read *The Nightingale's Song* [*The Nightingale's Song*, book written by Robert Timberg, 1995] [It was the part about James Webb that caught my attention.] He had three tours in Vietnam and the treatment he got when he came back, how professors were, you know, hectoring him; people were calling him killer and all that sort of thing, which was not something I thought was appropriate.

KH: Did you notice any of that kind of animosity on campus to the extent that you—?

JK: No, I didn't see it there. Again, Midwestern campus, there was just a cadre of people who cared about the war and there was a sea of indifference except on a sunny day in the spring where you can have a good excuse to leave class and watch an antiwar rally. So much of that was—

KH: Yeah, the long winter, sun's out finally. But how would you describe the relationship between campus in general or perhaps antiwar students specifically and the rest of Mankato?

JK: Well, there's always friction in a college town because, especially because college, you know, young, eighteen-, nineteen- and twenty-year-olds are pretty obnoxious. They drink a lot. I think most of the—well, I think people were—some people were offended by the march. It isn't—and then, of course, the burning of flags and symbols, but that was across the country. I know there was talk about town and gown friction but I don't think it ever got to a boiling point that I sensed.

KH: And you graduated in 1970.

JK: Yeah.

KH: And then what did you do?

JK: Well, I wanted, because I had a 306 lottery number—I never remember if was six or seven—but I thought it was my duty to do some alternative service even though I didn't have to. So I looked for alternative service and I found this free school on an island on Lake Minnetonka called Minnesota Summerhill [Minnesota Summerhill School, Spray Island, Lake Minnetonka, MN] and that was about as structured as Barclay Kuhn's class and my daughter drank—I was oil painting at the time—and she drank some turpentine that had paint in it and I ended up racing her to the hospital and she was in for like five days and that was the end of that experiment.

And then my next job was at the legislature in January of 1971. And that's where I've been ever since, forty-seven years ago.

KH: Wow. And what was that first job?

JK: Well, it was in Caucus Minority Research which was—I was to staff the minority caucus and our minority leader was Nick Coleman. There were three of us and we did research projects, you know, you want to know, How can we make Lake Superior the best fishing lake in the world? I remember I got that question and I called the DNR [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources] and they said, Raise the temperature fifteen degrees. But we're doing that now.

KH: Yeah, one way or the other.

JK: Yeah, that kind of stuff. And then political campaigns and then they—at the end of the session—it was a session job. Patronage in those days so Nick Coleman met with Tom Kelm, the guy who was offended by my letter describing Humphrey having the ashes in his mouth after—and Nick told Tom Kelm that he wanted John Kaul to have a job in the government and in administration and he got me a job in the Department of Labor and Industry, working the Minnesota OSHA Project. And then I worked on the campaigns and then in '73, the Democrats took control with thirty-eight Democrats and I became the Director of Caucus Research, majority research.

And then '74, when there was a vacancy as chief of staff to the majority leader, he picked me, where I stayed until he and I both left. And then I went and became a lobbyist for ITT [ITT Inc., formerly ITT Corporation, White Plains, NY] which was like going into—going to Parris Island Boot Camp [Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island, SC]. That's why I wanted an experience that was much more disciplined and not political and I went there and—seven years and I got to understand what working for a craven and crooked corporation was like.

And then I decided I wanted to do something more altruistic, actually a few years into that job but it took me a while to find another job and then I became the lead lobbyist for the state university system and then when the merger occurred, I became the lead lobbyist for MNSCU [Minnesota State Colleges and Universities]. And that was so chaotic that, you know, either the

board was bad or the chancellor was bad, depending on what month it was and after auditioning for about four chancellors, because the turnover was so high, I set up my own business in 2000.

KH: Which was what?

JK: It's called Capitol Gains with an o-l and it's contract lobbyist and I plan to retire at the end of this—things still to do through the end of the year but this is my last session unless Trump destroys the stock market and our savings. And hopefully Ryan [Paul Davis Ryan Jr. (1970-)] won't be able to destroy Medicare and Social Security because he's resigning.

KH: So going back to the Vietnam era, you were part of two kind of major, one perhaps more major than the other, expressions of antiwar sentiment in the McCarthy campaign and the stuff that was going on at Mankato State in 1970. How would you compare those two experiences—working for a political campaign versus being a student on campus and getting things going there?

JK: Well, both have their utility. I think it's important for people to take to the streets. I was at the Women's March; I was at the Science March; I think that it's important to get people riled up; that's how you change opinions. Electoral politics appeal to me because I know you can make a difference although I know your ability to do that is declining rapidly as the system becomes more and more corrupt and, you know, nothing bonds man to man like the passage from hand to hand of cash. And this is—it's just a disheartening situation, the role that money plays in special interest groups. The fact that the NRA has such a death hold on our country's politics even though, now up to 90 percent of people want background checks. There needs to be a constitutional amendment on campaign finance.

KH: Do you think it's going to happen?

JK: Well, people are going to have to really take to the streets like never before for that to happen.

KH: Do you think they will?

JK: Well, I think there is—it's kind of like there's a lot of moisture in the air and there's a lot of heat and it is entirely possible there could be a big storm but the public policy cycles oscillate so fast nowadays. When the Republicans screwed up the economy in the 1920s, resulting in the Great Depression, it created a coalition that lasted from 1932 all the way up, even through Eisenhower, except Eisenhower was a Republican president but the Congress was Democratic for most of that. So it was like twenty-some, maybe a quarter of a century that that coalition had held together and when those idiots destroyed the economy in 2008, six months later they were screaming about the regulation, over-regulation and people were buying it. Because, I mean, this is a tired old observation that everybody makes, but when—I don't know how old you are but—

KH: I was born in '68.

JK: Okay, so you still had the experience—we all sat around three campfires at night, ABC, CBS and NBC, and we had what was purported to be, and to some extent was, objective news. Newspapers had large news holds; people were better informed. You didn't have Joseph Goebbels' [Paul Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945)] child, Fox News, and, of course, the left is trying to replicate that, too, not very well, and I think, actually MSNBC tries to tell the truth. They don't do the kind of distortions that Fox News does or the Breitbart [Breitbart News Network] people do—the outright lies—but we've lost that value of objective journalism, of objective fact. People don't read newspapers; they cherry pick their sources and it's really not very good for a democracy.

KH: So the splintering of the media up into a million different sources you think is really a disservice because you can cherry pick?

JK: Probably the greatest threat, second greatest threat to survival after Trump being the president is—but he's also the result of that. So, I mean, yeah, I think the fact that if everybody was getting the Minneapolis and St. Paul paper and they had the news hold they had even in the 1970s or eighties, and if we had three networks that did the news and they were trying to be objective and they had good budgets and good people out there, you wouldn't have this because people wouldn't be able to take a boutique approach to, you know, developing opinions on things. It's deeply disturbing.

My daughter's a reporter for *MinnPost* [*MinnPost*, Minneapolis, MN]. She went to the Republican Party on election night when Trump was elected and she was being taunted by some of these extreme right-wingers in very ugly ways because she was an "enemy of the state," as Trump says. This is Germany in the thirties. I mean, we're so reckless about making that analogy but I'm reading *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* [*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, by William L. Shirer, 1960] right now and I'm seeing a lot of parallels.

KH: Do you see any beacons of hope out there?

JK: Well, one beacon of hope is that there's ebbs and flows, you know, the pendulum does swing back and forth and young people, by and large, aren't real happy with Trump looking for ways to pump more carbon into the atmosphere that they're going to get. Young people don't hate gays; young people don't—aren't so concerned about what color your skin is; young people are really turned off about politics. That's—you don't know if they're going to use that as a mechanism for trying to make corrections. I guess I see some hopeful signs that the younger folks are—kind of get it. They think they're not going to have any Social Security.

I think that one thing that the Baby Boomers better worry about is we have left such an incredible mess that if I were them, I really wouldn't want to take very good care of my generation when they're in the nursing homes or when they need medical care because all we've done is we've made everything worse. Everything's worse.

But I think there's hope because there are swings and I guess it's important to remember that the same electorate that elected Trump, elected Obama twice and I think that it's important to realize

that Trump's appeal to a lot of people was that they hate Congress and they hate Washington and they wanted someone who was going to kick the shit out of Washington. So I think it was their way of punishing those incompetent bumblers in D.C. I think that was a part of it and he still didn't—he still lost by three million votes, but, yeah, I think that people are so disgusted with gridlock and the triviality of what's going on out there.

There were times when great things happened. I was at an event last night where we were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act which set aside thirteen thousand miles of pristine river in forty states. Could that happen today? No, never. And that had bipartisan support, overwhelming vote in the House and the Senate of Republicans and Democrats. You wouldn't get one Republican vote to do that today.

KH: So how, you know, this conversation about our current situation as well as, you know, what was going on in the Vietnam era, leads me to this question, because, you know, there's so much cause for despair and frustration for different reasons in those different time periods. So my question for you and I've been asking most people this question is, How do you—to the extent that you see yourself or that you were or are an activist, trying to make—

JK: I am an activist still.

KH: positive change?

JK: I intend to be after I retire.

KH: So how do you sustain your momentum when you—that's your calling and you come up against these really entrenched frustrations, signs of despair, you know, failures, whether it's failure to get the nomination or this entrenchment of political divide. How do you keep going? I mean, you've done it for fifty years.

JK: Yes, fifty-one years of political activism. Well, I'd say, my boss and mentor who, unfortunately, I didn't have much time to talk about today, Nick Coleman, the guy that was the majority leader, when he retired from the senate he gave a talk and he quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes, A man must participate in the actions and passions of his time. ["I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived," Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (1841-1935),1884] That's always stuck with me. Another thing is that F. Scott Fitzgerald, I will not do a fair job repeating it, but the sense of it was, The sign of a first rate intellect is the ability to hold two very diametrical opinions and still be able to move forward ["The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function," Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896-1940), 1936].

KH: Ah.

JK: And the last thing I think of all the time is what David Lloyd George [British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George (1863-1945)], the British Prime Minister after Asquith [Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928)], that, It is hard to advance with a retreating mind.

So you know there's going to be ebbs and tides. Fortunately the Baby Boomers are going to die off, the sooner the better, and hopefully a new generation of Americans will come forward and have some solutions and some higher standards and higher aspirations and I believe that will happen. And I intend to, you know, I said, it's a quest for me.

But, I just finished my—I've done a number of documentaries. Three of them have been on TPT [Twin Cities Public Television, St. Paul, MN] and the last one is on the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act [*The Wild and Scenic St. Croix*, John Kaul and Tom Reiter, filmmakers, 2018]. I want to keep educating people about important issues and I don't have to convince everybody that goes and sees a documentary or sees it on TV, I only need to find one person because it's that one person that's going to make the difference. There's some Barack Obama out there or there's some kid that is going to get turned on and is going to have some skills and he's going to make a difference and so I mean, my job is to look for that, you know, hopefully turn on a couple people to get involved that have a real contribution to make because people emerge out of the darkness and lead people in a good direction.

KH: So you see that as your job as an activist writ large whether you do it through more official political campaigning or lobbying or through your art?

JK: Yeah, but I'll stay in involved in campaigns; when I retire I will not have nearly as much money as I have now. I'm not going to be a big donor, not that I've ever been a big donor, but I suppose I used to give five or six thousand bucks a year to campaigns. I'm not going to do that anymore, but I'm a good photographer and I'm a good videographer so I can donate my time to helping people I want to get elected in that respect. I will not door knock; it does not increase my appreciation for the American public when I do that. (laughter) I'm sorry. But, candidates need to do it and I think part of it is that people don't want to talk to a volunteer. They would rather talk to an elected official for some of this. People are not interested in talking to me and I'm not interested in talking to them so I shouldn't be door knocking any more.

KH: But you did that essentially in '68—

JK: In '68 I did a lot of it.

KH: when you called everybody in the precinct.

JK: Well, yeah, and then I went door knocking in Wisconsin and in Indiana and I remember these two little old ladies telling me I was wasting my time because it was all decided by the electronic college and they were right. (laughter) Because the electronic college got us Bush and Trump.

KH: Because of the electronic college. So, I want to kind of wind this up also by winding up the war part of it. Nineteen-seventy-three—the Paris Peace Accords; we pull our troops out officially; leave some remnant behind. POW's come home—

JK: Yeah, all of the bastard children that we—yeah, all that.

KH: So what were you thinking about the end of the war? What were your thoughts?

JK: Well, I thought, that, you know, whatever has happened since my involvement in the antiwar movement, history has proven that I was correct. That it was a bad idea; it was immoral. I mean, we look askance at the Germans for exterminating six million Jews. Well, we exterminated three million Southeast Asians—for what? We ought to take a good hard look at ourselves. What is that—is that only half as bad a crime because it was only half as many people were killed? I think there are just wars and that was not one.

Korea was probably just. It was a U.N. peacekeeping action, but I can't think of a—and Afghanistan was justified insomuch as we were trying to get Osama bin Laden and every stupid thing that happened after that was totally unjustified. I think that—when I think about soldiers, I think the country owes our fighting men and women the responsibility of finding wars that are worthy of their blood and we're not doing a very good job of that.

To ask—my son is twenty-two. Boy oh boy, I would—I asked Mondale—I don't know if you've heard the interview. On that, I said, "We went to a volunteer army. Do you think that was a good idea?" And I'm really torn on that. The last thing I want my son to do is die in the Middle East for no good cause except for oil. And we're just—it's a breeder reactor for anti-American sentiment. We're just sowing the seeds of our own destruction over there. And if—you know damn well—if we had a draft that students would be in the streets. There's no check on the executive branch with a volunteer army. Maybe we'd be better off if my son had to decide if he was going to be a conscientious objector or go to Canada or fight.

KH: The draft makes a huge difference.

JK: Yeah.

KH: Huge.

JK: How many of those escapades would have been possible? I mean, people would have signed up to go to Afghanistan, you bet. But—and no weapons of mass destruction. And all those neo-cons. I saw something. I don't know if it was legitimate or not but they had a list of all the people in the Bush administration that were the super hawks in the Middle East and forty-some people, including Cheney [US Vice President Richard Bruce Cheney (1941-)] and Wolfowitz [Paul Dundes Wolfowitz (1943-)], they all had bone spurs; they never went in the military but they want to send everyone else over there. The hypocrisy of it; the arrogance. It's a sense of entitlement. You know, you're entitled to, at will, send people to die.

KH: And do you think that sense of entitlement and hypocrisy is unique to or more prevalent amongst Republicans?

JK: Well, I think more recently it has [been].
The Johnson era, even the—Kennedy, there was some—it's convenient to think that Jack Kennedy would have pulled us out but there's evidence that he had a lot better second

convolution thinking than Lyndon Johnson did. And I think he released his testosterone a lot in ways that Johnson didn't so they, you know, for Johnson it was, I'm not going to be the first president to lose the war. I think Kennedy was thinking he had to get through the '64 election, but you could make a case otherwise. So the Democratic Party was the party of war in Vietnam but it was also the party that—it was a party that had a debate on it. Republicans don't spend a lot of time debating or asking questions like that. They're—one of the chief predictors, I read, in whether you voted for Trump or not was how responsive you were to top-down, authoritarian direction.

KH: Hmm. Interesting.

JK: And Republicans have always been more like that. The Democrats—you watch Fox News, it's like the White House—it's like someone sits in the situation room and puts out the talking points and they all say the same thing. Try to get two Democrats to say the same thing. It's impossible. They used to have lots of messages; now they have no messages. (laughter) What's worse?

KH: Right. So as you look back on the Vietnam War era for yourself, is there anything that you wish you would have done differently?

JK: Well, I really—shall I say I'm proud of the fact that I saw something that was wrong, I believe was wrong, and I took a stand. I was married and I had a child and between being married and having a child, I would have liked to have gone on some of those marches in Washington. I would have liked to have been in Chicago, but I couldn't. Like that same sensibility that had me call the chief of police because I didn't want people to get hurt, that practical streak in me, said, You don't leave your wife and your couple month old child here while you go off and march around in Washington. Didn't have the money. So I wish I could have done more.

But I certainly do not regret that I took a stand against the war. I'm proud of the fact that I had the insight and then I took action because you have to participate in the actions and passions of your time.

KH: In any of your work, well, or maybe and personally, do you have any contact with the Vietnamese population here in Minnesota, many of whom came over as refugees from what was called South Vietnam?

JK: Interesting question. There's some restaurateurs that I've gotten to know a little bit but the one that I really made a connection with is the Cambodians because—are you a Minnesotan? Yeah. So remember Phil Krinke [Philip B. Krinke (1950-)] hyper conservative member of the House?

KH: Yeah.

JK: His wife, well, his wife is with the hospital association which I work with so I work with Mary [Mary Ramsey Krinke] and so I've gotten to know Phil. When he was in the legislature I

steered clear of him because I knew there was nothing that I wanted that he wanted. But he and I have become friends.

And renting above his space at Snelling Heating and Air Conditioning [Snelling Heating Cooling and Electrical, St. Paul, MN] is—there's a Cambodian museum [National Khmer Legacy Museum, 1404 Concordia Avenue, St Paul, MN] and Phil is actually a really—he doesn't want to use tax dollars, but he's generous with people and causes that he likes and so he got hooked up with the Cambodians. I've been interviewing these refugees because they want to have it on record. I've done about eight or nine so I've gotten to know some Cambodians and they've been telling their stories to me about—and their problem is they sided with us; they lost and they came over here as refugees because they would have been killed if they didn't. And there's no recognition here to speak of the fact that they are veterans like ours who fought with us. No bennies; no recognition.

So in fact I brought—Kosel Sek is his name—and I brought him over to meet with Bob Dettmer [Robert P. "Bob" Dettmer (1951-)] a month ago to talk about ways that their efforts could be recognized.

KH: And they must be far less recognized even than the Hmong. I mean, the Hmong [unclear] and haven't for what? Fifteen, twenty years?

JK: And I was close to Mee Moua [Mee Moua (Qaav Ruom (1969-)] when she was in the legislature, but, when they came here, it was really radical in the 1970s I think like all of a sudden, St. Paul overnight changed. University Avenue was just a disaster area. You wouldn't drive your car down it. They moved in; they changed things. They made—they improved—they've been an added value certainly to the heritage and the vitality of the community as immigrants always have.

KH: What do you think overall of the impact of the antiwar movement on the war and/or US culture in general?

JK: Well, was Mondale right when he said that it ended the war sooner than it might have otherwise? I don't know. Maybe it did. I think that the main contribution of the antiwar movement was that cadre of young people that got involved in politics in the seventies and really transformed things; progressive people that built on the progressivism of the Republicans in the sixties and fifties and took it the next step.

So, the biggest contribution, I think, of the Vietnam War, was that group of people that stayed the course, got involved, got elected and did all kinds of progressive things like the Minnesota Miracle. That wouldn't have happened without the fact that there was that vast infusion of young Democrats who wanted to do some things, including Wendell Anderson [Minnesota Governor, Wendell Richard "Wendy" Anderson (1933-2016)] who was thirty-seven years old when he got elected governor. Thirty-seven years old. There's a governor who is under-rated. Tragic story. But extremely progressive and gutsy.

KH: Is there anything else we should talk about or get on the record, as they say?

JK: I'm just glad you're doing it. I've really—it's been fun to go down memory lane. There's a—John Buchan [John Buchan (1875-1940)], who was a favorite author of John Kennedy's—this is an example of how John Kennedy influenced me—he had a book which—the English version of it is *Memory Bar the Door* [*Memory Hold-the-Door*, Hodder & Stoughton,1940] and the American edition was *Pilgrim's Way* [*Pilgrim's Way: An Essay in Recollection*, 1940)].

It was one of Kennedy's favorite books. And John Buchan talks about how he's aging and there's this wonderful quote in there about, which I won't do justice to but, When you get to a certain age, much more of your time is spent in the past because you're footing in the present is not as strong as it used to be and the amount of future ahead of you is much reduced. And I find that that's—at seventy-one, I'm still advancing and I have big dreams, but I do find myself, you know, nostalgic about the past.

KH: So where does—where do these years, these Vietnam years, fit into your overall life?

JK: Well, I suppose there's been some defining elements in my life and the Vietnam activism was one. My first marriage and the wonderful children it produced were a big deal. Quitting drinking in 1976, forty, almost forty-two years ago, was another one and then my current marriage and the kids. So those are the big deals in my life. But Vietnam defined who I was. I mean, I—if I hadn't engaged what course would my life have possibly taken otherwise? Would I have ended up selling sporting goods? Maybe. (laughs) And I think that—I guess that this is a very important point I would make. I still believe that being involved in policy-making, in government, is a very high calling, perhaps the highest calling. It's just that we've got a lot of taconite ore in there right now instead of high content iron and we need to move back into a richer time. I think it'll happen because it has in the past.

KH: What do you want people to know about the Vietnam era?

JK: I want people to know that the Nuremburg Trials are something they should know about, and the trial of Adolph Eichmann that you never can use as a defense you were just following orders. You should not just go along with things. You should question things. You should question authority. I taught my kids to question authority and it's made life as a parent tough but I don't want them to just accept what people say as the truth.

KH: How many kids do you have?

JK: I had four; I lost one to schizophrenia. I've got one that's forty-nine; one that's twenty-eight and one that's twenty-two and two marriages. So, yeah, I remember there was a George F. Will [George Frederick Will (1941-)] column—I like reading George F. Will—and this one, I really related to this. There was a guy sitting in a dentist chair and the dentist asked him, "What color is that car out on the street?" And the guy looked at it and he said, "It's green on this side." That's me. Until I know what's on the other side, I'm going to say it's green on this side.

KH: Anything else?

JK: I guess that's my final thought.

KH: Green on this side. Well thanks, John, for doing this.

JK: Well yeah, it's been fun you really got this art down.

KH: Good—thank you.

JK: I don't think anybody—I don't know how you keep coming back to the central points I suppose you have questions but I took you all over the place and you kept coming back!

KH: Driving you back, whether you like it or not! We are going back. (laughter) Thank you very much I appreciate it.

JK: Well, thank you.

End of Interview