

Joan R. Braden and Thomas W. Braden, Oral History Interview – 10/11/1969
Administrative Information

Creator: Joan R. Braden, Thomas W. Braden

Interviewer: Dennis J. O'Brien

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Biographical Note

Thomas Braden was editor and publisher of the Blade Tribune in Oceanside, California (1954-1968); a columnist for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate (1968-1986); and a Commentator on CNN, CBS, and NBC (1978-1989). Joan Braden was an aide to Nelson A. Rockefeller; presidential campaign staff member for John F. Kennedy (1960) and Robert F. Kennedy (1968); and coordinator of consumer affairs and special assistant to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the State Department (1976-1978). In this interview, the Bradens discuss their roles in John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign and Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign; California politics; humorous anecdotes about the Kennedy family; and Robert F. Kennedy's speech in Indianapolis on the night Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, among other issues.

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Joan R. Braden and Thomas W. Braden

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Oral History Interview

with

Joan R. Braden and Thomas W. Braden

October 11, 1969
Chevy Chase, Maryland

by Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: Well, I guess the logical place to begin is with the question when did you first meet Senator Kennedy, John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

THOMAS: I think I first met him at Joseph Alsop's [Joseph W. Alsop] house here in Washington for a dinner, I think while he was still a representative, but he may have been a senator by that time. At any rate, my wife knew him better than I did because she came to Washington more frequently, so she used to see him at dinner parties. I knew him no better than that he was a good-looking and pleasant fellow at dinner and I had fun talking with him afterwards.

O'BRIEN: This was back in the late fifties, I suppose. No. It must have been...

THOMAS: Late fifties. After I'd left Washington and before anybody thought of him as anything but a handsome, young senator.

O'BRIEN: Did you see much of him when he made his California trips during the fifties? He was out there several times on various fundraising...

THOMAS: No. I never did, never saw him then. The only time I ever saw him in that part of his pre-presidential race phase was when he came out to La Jolla to

go to a cocktail party at Jack Betor's house. Jack Betor had been a college, or I think a Choate School, prep school acquaintance. And he had an enormous house on the beach in La Jolla. He gave a huge party and Jack came out there and made a short speech. That was the only time I saw him during that stage.

O'BRIEN: Did you sense at that point that he was interested in the presidency?

THOMAS: No. I don't think he was saying it. The idea was that he was just.... Everybody knew it and he wasn't talking about it. I don't think he was really talking about running for the presidency at that point; he was just talking about national issues. I've forgotten what the speech he made was. It wasn't very long, and there were a lot of people there, most of them potential fundraisers, and a few friends of Betor and myself.

O'BRIEN: Well, you went to Wisconsin, as I understand, during the primary campaign of 1960.

THOMAS: Yeah. I followed that. I took my wife with me. And I wrote stories for my own newspaper about it. But oddly enough, most of the Wisconsin campaign I spent with Hubert [Hubert H. Humphrey] with whom I had a kind of odd underdog affinity. I felt so sorry for Hubert Humphrey that.... And besides, he wasn't being covered. Everybody was following Kennedy. He had buses wherever he went, and I went with him quite a lot. But it was more by that—I think that was in May, April or May. Was it May? And there was still snow on the ground, and it was cold. The Kennedy campaign was terribly well-organized and got up at 6 o'clock in the morning and went off and did the tours, followed by bus after bus of press. And poor old Hubert was running around with, at one point, myself, my wife, and a guy from the *Minneapolis Tribune* as the only entourage. I remember one occasion when Hubert had hired an airplane because somebody had told him that NBC [National Broadcasting Company] and CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] were going to cover him on that day. And as frequently happens in these occasions, they didn't show up. So there he was with the airplane, and three of us rattling around in it. We got fogged in in Wausau and then flew up to Duluth, and we got fogged in again and had to spend the night. Poor old Hubert was.... And he should have been despondent. And instead of that he was coming out to see the three of us, the three reporters in this enormous airplane, pounding his chest and saying, "I feel like a tiger!" [Laughter] I felt so sorry for poor Hubert that I spent most of the time following and writing pathetic stories about him.

O'BRIEN: Who was doing his press relations for him then?

THOMAS: Who?

O'BRIEN: For Humphrey. Did he have anyone at all?

THOMAS: Yeah. He had a guy. I don't remember who it was.

O'BRIEN: How about the Kennedys' press relations?

THOMAS: Well, Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger] was there. And in the front of the bus used to sit—what was the name? Who was it, the fellow who was mayor of Milwaukee, I think? Well, anyway we saw Gaylord Nelson. And we saw a lot of Nestingen [Ivan A. Nestingen] or something like that, I think mayor of Milwaukee.

The only person I knew in the Humphrey campaign in Wisconsin was a fellow named Jim Loeb [James I. Loeb], who had been out there. He was working Madison. The college professors were all for Humphrey.

The only vivid impression I have of John Kennedy in that Wisconsin campaign was standing outside the factory gate one day at 6:30 in the morning, just outside Milwaukee in the cold and all buses lined up and the candidate all in a dark blue pin-striped suit with a white handkerchief, looking impeccable and nice; and proffering his hand to a lot of guys who were hustling into work with their lunch pails. And I remember that perfectly because it was so so tough; so many people refused to shake his hand, looked at him and turned aside or made some gesture of disdain. I watched him stand there, smiling and keeping up his appearance. He turned around and bantered a little bit with me or with somebody else standing outside the gate. It was an enormously likeable thing to see a guy going through that, and also it made me feel how really cruel politics is. Because you or I standing there and putting our hands out and saying, "Hello. I'm John Kennedy. I hope you'll vote for me"—he kept repeating it—and having somebody insult you, you know, your face should show a change; you should want to hit him back in some way. And it was odd, just interesting, it's just an impression I remember about the bravery that's required and the change from the norm that's required for a guy to go through something like this.

O'BRIEN: You never saw any reaction to this kind of politics? Did he really enjoy it or did he...

THOMAS: No. I didn't have the sense that he enjoyed that at all. Oh, no, how could anybody enjoy.... I mean it was so inhuman; he obviously didn't enjoy standing there being insulted. And not that they were, you know, I don't mean that they were insulting him by doing anything untoward; it was just that people being impolite to other people is never nice. One just had the sense of great forbearance: "I have this job to do, and I'm going to do it. How do you do? I'm Jack Kennedy. I hope you'll vote for me"—over and over and over again, smiling, and patient and courageous, I thought.

And I watched him.... I don't know where—I've forgotten where we went, but I think most of the time I was with him in Wisconsin, we were just traveling around Milwaukee, sometimes at ladies' lunches, sometimes smaller suburbs. Once we were in some suburb when he was walking across the street, and Joan and I were standing nearby, and he went like this with his finger, and we walked into a coffee shop and sat down and had a cup of coffee with him and chatted. At a point like that everything was dropped, and we just talked about people we knew in Washington and friends, and how was so-and-so—a complete shift of gears from candidate to friend.

O'BRIEN: Well, how on your examining the press—was there any particular thing that stands out in the way that the press was handled in Wisconsin? Did you get the feeling that a lot of time and consideration was taken, you know, before you'd leave?

THOMAS: I certainly got the impression that it was handled with great force and vigor and that the candidate himself attached enormous importance to it. I remember once in the bus, John Kennedy suddenly turning to Pierre and pointing at a paragraph, or two or three lines of type about halfway through a front-page story in the *Milwaukee Journal* about the campaign—I don't even remember what it was, and I don't think I knew what it was—but I just remember that the candidate suddenly turned to Pierre and said, "That's wrong," passing him back the newspaper and pointing, "That's wrong." The bus stopped at once. Pierre got out and rambled through a snowbank to a pay telephone that was by the side of the road. And we all waited while he made the phone call. He came back, and I don't remember exactly what he said, but obviously, I knew that he had called the *Milwaukee Journal*, and complained or corrected that error or pointed out that the candidate didn't quite say this or that. One certainly had the sense that the Kennedys.... John Kennedy didn't run a campaign where you waited and saw the fellow later, or called up the publisher or said, "Well, gee, that's too bad, they got that wrong." You did something about it right then.

O'BRIEN: Did the press appreciate.... Did this leave an impression on the press and some of the people he was traveling with?

THOMAS: I think the impression it left was one of on the whole flattering to the press. It's important what we write, it's very important—they made a mistake, get at them right away, get it changed.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about your own involvement to this point in California politics?

THOMAS: I didn't have any. I was just a newspaperman covering a campaign and obviously interested in who was going to win the Democratic primary. I don't remember what I wrote about it. I remember at the time I thought the stories I wrote were fairly good, but they probably, if you look back on it, or I remember Stewart Alsop read them and said, "You're for Humphrey," he said, "I can tell," so perhaps my bias showed. I thought at the time of John Kennedy as being the symbol of efficiency, power, and a kind of golden boy; and poor old Hubert as being a kind of nice bumbling old style politician, and I felt sorry for him. The Wisconsin campaign was so obviously General Motors versus American Motors that my heart went out for the underdog.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, well, how is it then that you find your way into the Citizens for Kennedy movement?

THOMAS: Well, then after that campaign I went back to, of course, running my

newspaper. I was a Democrat and naturally would have supported the fellow who won the Democratic primary, whether it would have been Hubert or Jack. And in any event I don't mean to imply I thought that Hubert Humphrey was a much better man. I'm just implying the fact of the underdog user. But I went back to run the newspaper, and I think, as I recall, one day Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] called me up and asked me if I would be chairman of Kennedy's campaign in California. And I said.... I was surprised, both flattered—flattered, surprised and a little taken aback, because I didn't (a) know Pat that well. I've since learned, or must have learned somewhat subsequently that he got the idea from Warren Christopher [Warren M. Christopher], who was a good friend of mine and still is. I think, if I may interpret what Warren thought, was this was going to be a kind of a young guy's campaign, a clean-cut, new, different, new style politics. And Chris thought that, must have thought, "Well, Braden fits that bill and he would be a good figurehead chairman." By figurehead I knew that without any malice because obviously what I knew about running a political campaign.... I'd never done it.

So in any event Pat called me and asked me if I would do it. I said that I might or I would or, I've forgotten precisely what, but I certainly was interested. He then asked me if I would.... He said, "Well, Ted Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy] is coming out to California, and he'll call you." I'm not sure that Pat at the time he called me didn't say, "Ted Kennedy's here with me, and we want you to be the chairman of the Californian...." That was it. "We want you to be the chairman of the Californian campaign." And, "Do you know each other?" And I said, no, I didn't know him. But in any event, I made a date to meet him in Los Angeles at the Ambassador Hotel on a specified afternoon.

O'BRIEN: It must've been in July or somewhere around then. Wasn't it?

THOMAS: I forgot.

O'BRIEN: After the Convention trip.

THOMAS: Had to be after the Convention. That's right. Of course, it did. By that time, of course.... I just said I would have naturally supported the Democratic candidate. By that time there had been another thing that had made me much more interested in the campaign, and that was that my wife had had a job during the Convention in which she performed yeoman service. Paul Ziffren was in charge of the Convention.

O'BRIEN: Right.

THOMAS: And he asked Joanie to.... He decided, Paul Ziffren decided that they would hold the acceptance of the Convention, which is a new twist, acceptance of the nomination in the Coliseum. And Joan is a pretty able girl, and she doesn't know much about politics either. And the idea that.... I don't think it ever occurred to her that you couldn't hold a convention acceptance in a coliseum. She went back here to Washington—I'm getting into her story here for a minute, but it shows why I became interested—she went back here to Washington at the request of Robert Kennedy

[Robert F. Kennedy], who called her up when he found out she was in charge of filling the Coliseum. He was vigorously opposed to doing it, said it was about the silliest idea he'd ever heard of in politics. The Coliseum as you know hold like a hundred thousand people. She always says that she argued with him about it and said, "I'll fill that coliseum." And he said, "Just let me tell you. I don't know you, and I don't know how good you are, but if you don't.... If my brother appears in the Coliseum before sixty thousand empty seats, I'll shoot you." And Joanie did a terrific job; she very nearly packed that coliseum. She did it by all sorts of ruses and devices, such as making it very difficult to get the seats—pretending that it was—distributing them en masse, but with the idea that it was really tough to get them, to old folks homes, hospitals. You know, I think they hit every.... Every home for the indigent was empty for that day—buses arranged to carry in the people. I've forgotten precisely what the crowd figure was, but there was, as far as the [unclear] was concerned, there were enough people in that coliseum so you would have though that Norte Dame was playing SC [University of Southern California].

O'BRIEN: There was some rub with the county committee on that, wasn't there with Rose [Donald W. Rose], hadn't Rose sold a bunch of seats or something?

THOMAS: You'll have to ask Joanie about that. I've forgotten what I know.... I wasn't there.... I just had the natural sympathy for it or an affinity with my own wife, but I remember she had a big scrape with him about getting Mrs. Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] in to see the thing. She had a terrible time getting her in—the county committee didn't want her in. She and Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler] finally managed to get Mrs. Kennedy a seat.

But afterwards, the candidate was elated; he asked us to come to dinner on the night afterwards. I remember going in and realizing that tiny thrill one gets out of being a big shot on a guest list when I saw Bailey, John Bailey [John Moran Bailey] of Connecticut standing in the restaurant. He was upstairs, up a long hall with a banister, standing there asking if he could just come in for just a second to talk to the President and being told, "No,"—or not the President, but the candidate—and being told, "No," he couldn't. "Private party." We walked into the room and the first thing I saw was Jack Kennedy seated at a round table with some people. And the next thing I knew, he stood up on his chair and clapped as we walked into the room, not for me, but for my wife. And it was a thrill. And everybody stood up; when he did it everybody else did it. So we walked into the room with everybody standing on chairs clapping for Joanie. And you know, from that moment on, as far as I was concerned, he couldn't do any wrong. I'd do anything for him.

Well, anyway, then, I went up and saw Ted Kennedy that afternoon in the Ambassador Hotel, and he said to me—I'd never met him before, and we discussed this and that—and he said to me, "There's been a change. I don't want you to run the campaign. I want you to head the citizens group. I'm going to have to ask—I'm going to ask." I don't think he said, "I'm going to have to ask." He said, "I'm going to ask Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] to run the campaign." And I didn't know Jess Unruh except by reputation. He then said, "Will you do it?" And I said, "Sure. I'll do anything I can to help." And that was about it. I don't think Teddy had much of an idea where we were going from there; I think he was just getting people. And I drove back to Oceanside.

I remember that evening standing in the kitchen, and my wife asked me “What did they ask you to do?” And I told her and she said, “Don’t do it.” She was absolutely right. I argued with her and said, “Well, if you’re going to get into a political campaign, do anything you’re asked to do,” and she said, “except run a citizens organization against the regular party organization.” And she was absolutely right. She’s a much smarter politician—she was then and may still be a much smarter politician than I am. It was one of the.... It was a drastic mistake on my part and in my opinion a drastic error for the whole campaign.

O’BRIEN: Why?

THOMAS: Because as I look back on it, it was—I used to think and have thought for many years that it was—if I would have answered that question by saying, “Because Unruh was power mad and wished to destroy anything, any faction or group or element within the party that was not his to control....” But with mellowness of years I now realize that while some of that allegation, I think that allegation on the whole is true, there’s something to be said on the other side which is that I, being somewhat younger, well certainly younger and maybe naïve, didn’t realize that the Citizens movement—which should have been a kind of broadly-based thing attracting Republicans and maybe even Catholic Republicans—would immediately be seized upon by those factions of the party who opposed Unruh to try to take it away from him, to try to take his leadership away from him.

The first thing that happened, I remember when we set up the Citizens, was that Paul Ziffren called me, whom I knew pretty well, and said, “This is your chance.... This is our chance to take this thing away from Unruh. If he heads the Democratic Party, the Democratic Party’s going to be destroyed; we’re going to lose the election. He’s rotten, Tom. He’s no good.” All different.... He hated Unruh with a passion such as one can only understand by reading the Old Testament.

And that, on the other hand, was the only place I could turn to for support. If you’re going to set up a citizens committee you need money and a lot of other things, and Paul was enormously helpful. He arranged that we got some free office space; he started the thing out with two thousand dollars; and then he got his friends to contribute, and in general was the force behind the Citizens. And naturally with his known detestation of Unruh, it was very natural for Jess to say, “Ah ha. There’s a threat. And I’m going to kill it.” And he did, pretty effectively.

I think that the Citizens group did some good things. We made a certain amount of noise. We added to crowds at parades, raised some money, and put out brochures, and the sort of things one does in campaigns.

But the major effort that I made from a fundraising point of view—it’s a funny story. I had a board of citizens, most of whom were friends of Paul’s, and they were very conscientious. And we met once a week at lunch and decided on things to do. One of the major efforts we decided to make was to put Jack Kennedy’s speech before the Methodist ministers, to put it on the air with a lot of advertising, because we were operating out of Southern California with that great belt of fundamentalists and Baptist population which is centered around Bell [A. Donald Bell] and which is enormously anti-Catholic by instinct. This was so good—this publishing the film—so good and so gentle and so persuasive and

fundamentally appealing to the instincts for freedom of religion in America that we all thought this would be a good thing to show. So we had to raise the money for it and we had to put it on a television station. It's a half an hours time. It seems piddling now, but I think the time involved cost twelve thousand dollars, something like that, maybe a little less. The advertising was going to cost more. And we made a major thing of it, took ads in all the papers and so forth. And I remember getting Sid Brody [Sidney Franklin Brody], who is a businessman in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles son-in-law of Mary Lasker, to foot the major share of the dough. Sid's got a lot of money, but he's not attuned to giving it to politics, and I think it shook him to give as much as he did. But he was rather proud that he was doing it in this.... Being a Jew himself he was rather proud that he was doing it for this particular cause, freedom of religion; that was a natural appeal. So on the day before the thing went to be shown—with all the work we'd put into it and planning and pre-advertising and so forth—on the day before it was to be shown, whango, out comes the announcement from Democratic Headquarters Chairman, Jess Unruh, that on that evening two independent stations in Los Angeles and one of the network stations, I've forgotten, at any rate a station with much more appeal and power and drawing power than the one we had chosen would air the half-hour Kennedy broadcast before the Methodist ministers. It was a mean streak of Jess'.

O'BRIEN: Calculated on his part?

THOMAS: Oh, without any question. He knew that this was the major effort of the Citizens; and he knew we'd made a big thing of it; and he knew we'd gone out and raised the money for it; and he just with the snap of his finger destroyed it—a terrible waste for the candidate; a terrible waste for the campaign. But, you know, Jess was never one to.... Jess has never done anything in his life in my view, and he's done many, many good things, but he never did any of the good things without thinking of what was also good for him—in thinking about quite a lot, perhaps more than most men. But then that perhaps accounts for his considerable political success.

O'BRIEN: Well, was there anything else in the way of opposition or things that Unruh and Unruh's organization did to undercut the Citizens movement?

THOMAS: Well, he just undercut it all together. He just never included the Citizens movement in any of the things the candidate.... He saw to it that we had no claim on the candidate's time, which is a very important thing. If you're trying to run an organization and you have no, you never once have any say in where the candidate will appear, then you have no organization. If the candidate appears in California and you're not invited to participate in the event, you might as well pull up your tent, which in effect is what I tried to do really about halfway through it. I said, "Ah, the heck with it." I remember writing Teddy a letter and saying, you know, "This just isn't working. There's no point in going on;" and "Maybe I ought to quit." But Teddy was, you know, by that time really, it was too late. There was only one thing to do, and that was to go ahead and try to soldier it through.

But the problem with the Citizens was that Jess regarded it, I now think with some reason as a threat to him and he therefore killed it. Now, in the course of all this don't forget Kennedy didn't carry California.

O'BRIEN: Right, right.

THOMAS: And I've never understood why. That's one thing I never understood about the President's way of looking at this thing. He always regarded Jess as someone that he had to make count of, and this friend in court. It never seemed to me it struck him with enough force that he didn't carry California. I remember once at dinner afterwards at the White House, he said, "What have you got against Unruh?" I haven't mentioned Unruh, but apparently somebody he told him that I didn't like Unruh. I said, "Well, I think he lost California for you." And he shrugged and said, "You do? Well, Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] tells me that he's the fellow we've got to work with out there." You know, Kenny was right.

But I wound up that campaign with almost a passionate dislike of Jess, which, as they say, with time has mellowed. I see why he did what he did. But I still would say that in the balance that any politician must strike between working for another politician and working for a cause, which I regarded it. I was very idealistic about it; I thought the whole thing was a cause. It seemed to me that it was unbelievable that anybody would put their own personal ideas, personal ambitions into the cause. It doesn't seem to me so unbelievable now.

O'BRIEN: Especially after '68. Going back then, you know, in putting this citizens thing together, how did you organize it? Did you organize it geographically? Did you have ethnic divisions? Did you make special appeals to special groups, like old people?

THOMAS: Well, let's see. We started out with a group of Catholics who had been drawn together by a woman named Liz somebody. I've forgotten what they called it, the Kennedy Clubs, something like that—and had been paid for by Martin Pollard who was an automobile dealer in Southern California. Liz, what was her name? Liz, it's almost on the tip of my tongue. She had organized.... She was on the payroll of Martin Pollard, and for him had organized the thing called the Kennedy Clubs. Once you looked at it, you realized it was a 100 percent Catholic organization. So you had that base, but you wanted to expand it very rapidly because you didn't want to bring in this religious faction without.... And in the course of it however, maybe.... Inevitably her feelings got hurt as the thing expanded to become bigger than she could handle. I remember her sitting there at the desk with a little list of the people that she had in the organization. And I tried to make it a group of people who fit the title, that is who were not party Democrats, and who would normally not be in politics, with the exception of Paul Ziffren who had probably his own axe to grind in respect to Unruh and the party. You know he wanted to be the chairman of the party, I think I did. We just got people like Warren Christopher, who was not in politics, really; like Najeeb Halaby [Najeeb Elias Hall], who later became the head of FAA [Federal Aviation Agency], Mike Pollard, Sid Brody—I've forgotten who else was on that board of directors—and Mort Hall [Mortimer L. Hall]. We

got a lot of help from Pat Lawford [Patricia Kennedy Lawford]. That was about the idea—I was just to try to get people into it who would not normally be interested in Democratic politics.

The idea that we were going to get a lot of Republicans failed; we never did. We tried to and I've forgotten just how we tried. But we tried to make it something that was broad enough, sort of a concerned citizens' outlook so that we wouldn't antagonize Republicans. But I don't remember that we ever had any. I do recall we tried to do a... We tried to be big, which maybe was a mistake.

But, I remember calling Harold Oram [Harold L. Oram], who's a good friend of mine and who had raised money for various causes in New York. He's a professional fundraiser and a damned good one. We needed money. I got Oram to come out to Los Angeles and do his normal fundraising thing, and he did it. It was damn nice of him to do it—he did it for nothing because he knew me; he did it as an old friend. He sent his best girl out, Eve Bates, who's been very successful with this sort of thing. And they did the usual fundraising thing. They have lists and they send out telegrams, and they did send out telegrams. The money that we got in on this appeal just more than covered the cost of the telegrams and of the airplane transportation. In other words we sent out, I don't know how many thousand telegrams and got in a few thousand dollars.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any help from the county committee on that?

THOMAS: No. It was strictly an Oram thing. Oram and his fundraising list from all over the country. I recall Oram calling me after that was over and saying, "You're going to lose California. John Kennedy is going to lose California." And I said, "I don't think so. I think it looks very good." And Harold said, "No, you're going to lose. If at this point in the campaign, with the list I gave you and with the telegram we wrote, and you got in just enough to cover the cost of it, I can tell you you're going to lose."

O'BRIEN: Did you have any problem in this fundraising in competition with the regular organization? As I understand it, people like Bart Lytton and the Warschaws [Carmen H. Warschaw] contributed pretty heavily towards the national campaign. Could you get anything out of Adaman?

THOMAS: Not a penny, except on the last day Bart Lytton called and two checks were sent over by messenger, two fifteen thousand dollars checks, which we were to cash, put through our bank account, and immediately send over to Unruh. And I agreed to do that obviously because, you know, one wouldn't not. But that was just a way of getting Lytton to contribute to a separate organization for legal reasons. No. We never raised a penny from him. As I say, the regular organization—Jess was more than.... It was really unkind. I don't mean to imply through any of this understanding of Jess that there wasn't a lot of unkindness: meetings were held and we weren't invited; plans were made and we weren't invited; the candidate would come to California and we'd read it about it in the newspapers. Jess made damn sure, made damn sure that he wiped out Citizens. And I just happened to be the guy who was standing there and getting his feelings hurt.

O'BRIEN: Who did you have running your Los Angeles.... Did you have this divided, like Washington?

THOMAS: Oh, no. Let me make this clear. The whole thing that I am talking about is Southern California. There was somebody up north who was a retired admiral....

O'BRIEN: Right. Admiral Harlee [John Harlee].

THOMAS: I met him later. I met him later in the Bobby Kennedy campaign, nice fellow. He was in charge of Citizens in the north, and I don't know a damn thing about what they did up there. But I understand that they got along pretty well; you know, didn't have any fights. Whether they did anything, I don't know.

O'BRIEN: But you had the responsibility of all southern California, beginning with Los Angeles.

THOMAS: Yeah. Supposedly from Bakersfield down.

O'BRIEN: Did you have a separate person who was in charge of Los Angeles County and...

THOMAS: Well, Mort Hall was in charge of Los Angeles County. And Hugo Fisher [Hugo M. Fisher]—which was an odd one, but there again, you have difficulty—Hugo Fisher was in charge of San Diego. And the reason he went into Citizens was that he was vying with Unruh for leadership of the party. But Hugo was very good; he was very helpful; he did a good job.

O'BRIEN: Well, later he'd nominated for Postmaster General.

THOMAS: Well, whether he was or not, I don't know, but he tried to be. I just know that story by hearsay. He called me and said, "Anything you can do; send a wire or do something." He tried very hard to be Postmaster General.
The other guy.... Oh, there was a fellow that I had as assistant.... This was another reason, I think, why Citizens didn't work, although it may have been a subsidiary one. I had a guy who was named at the same time I was. When it was announced that I would be chairman of Citizens, it was also announced that Paul would be vice-chairman, a nice fellow who never did very much. But he did contribute, I think he contributed five hundred dollars, and I don't think he did much else.

O'BRIEN: But he had been in the Air Force, Assistant Secretary of the.... Does that ring a bell with you? That wouldn't be Harold Brown, would it?

THOMAS: No. It would be prior.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, prior.

THOMAS: I don't know why I can't think of his name. The next thing I heard from him was after the election—I went down to Palm Springs where my wife and I have a house—and he called me the Sunday after election and said he wanted to be Secretary of the Air Force. I think he had been Assistant Secretary, and would I call the candidate, I mean the nominee by then, the President-elect, which I did. I called somebody on the staff and put his name in.

I since learned that Robert Kennedy, who was the campaign manager, distrusted him very much and apparently for good reason. I gather—the man is dead now, he died suddenly of a heart attack shortly after the administration began—he never got the job he wanted. Somebody told me that Bobby knew some things that he had done as Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, which were rather like the Harold Talbot affair, and maybe he had something to do with it during the Eisenhower Administration [Dwight D. Eisenhower]. You remember that Talbot was fired suddenly for soliciting business for Defense companies, or for his own company on the Air Force stationary. Well, this guy was mixed up in this in some way, or so I heard; and Bobby mistrusted him very much. That again might have been a reason why Unruh was able to undercut the Citizens. Joanie may remember that fellow's name, but I can't.

O'BRIEN: I was thinking that, you know, putting this interview together and everything, that sometime if your wife, Joan, had some time out, I'd like to sit down with her at the tape recorder, particularly on '68. As I understand, she got very involved in that California campaign.

THOMAS: Yeah, much more than I did. She did a lot more about that than I did. In fact, in the Convention of '60, she did a hell of a lot more than anybody I know.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about on the national scene here at his time? You mentioned a number of contacts with Robert Kennedy. How about other people associated with the presidential campaign, people like Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]?

THOMAS: I never saw a great deal of either of them. As I say, Citizens was sort of out. I do recall an odd instance, considering what happened later. I remember one day that Bobby Kennedy came out to California.... Oh, you know one.... We ought to get Joan in on this because she got involved in on this Citizens thing right at the end. She got wifely feeling about it.... But I just want to say this one thing. I remember at some point or other taking a walk with Bobby Kennedy in some hotel yard, and saying to him, "Did you know that we're going to invade Cuba?" I really shouldn't have told him that, but my passion was so great for the victory of the candidate that I did tell him. And I said, "The fellow in charge if it is a great guy and you ought to get to see him right

away; his name is Dick Bissell [Richard Mervin Bissell, Jr.]" And raised his eyebrows and said nothing. I don't know whether he'd known about it before or not.

O'BRIEN: Where did you get your information?

THOMAS: Well, I had been in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] for many years.

O'BRIEN: Oh, I see.

THOMAS: And I kept in close touch. And I knew that we were planning it. And it occurred to me in some.... You know, I just wondered if it wouldn't catch him short. Kennedy was going around saying, "The enemy is fifteen miles from our gates. How can the Eisenhower Administration say...." Not the Eisenhower; he never attacked them, but "how can you say this and that when Cuba's not a.... The communists are ninety miles offshore." And I just had a hunch that maybe, since I knew that this invasion was under intense planning, I just had a hunch that maybe they'd pull it off before the election. And I thought he ought to know. But whether he ever did or not, I don't know. I remember asking Allen Dulles [Allen W. Dulles] about that. I've forgotten, but I think Allen did tell me that.... I've forgotten whether they briefed both Jack and Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] on that or not. I have a hunch that maybe the first time that Bobby Kennedy ever heard about the disaster that was later to overwhelm them was that evening walk in one of those hotels. I don't even know if he believed me. He must've, but he didn't say anything. Just a minute. [Interruption]

I was telling him about the troubles of the Citizens Committee...

JOAN: Are you talking about Jack?

THOMAS: John Kennedy. And it suddenly occurred to me that there was one occasion when you went that there was one occasion when you went back to Washington and talked with Jack about this. You might as well tell it.

O'BRIEN: Well, actually, the two of you, if you have some time today or sometime in the future I'd like to sit down with you and talk to you about some other things too.

JOAN: Great. Great. I would have to stop and think about it. My mind is not on 1960. Let's see.

THOMAS: He just asked me general questions about the Citizens. And I told him about the Unruh...

JOAN: No. I realize what he's doing now. I presume this is like what I did with Janet Auchincloss [Janet Lee Auchincloss] for the Kennedy Library [John

F. Kennedy Presidential Library], and not one that's going to be.... I interviewed Mrs. Auchincloss for the Kennedy.... This is more or less what you're doing? In other words, it's not for publication?

O'BRIEN: Right. It's something that you have complete literary, legal control over for whatever time...

JOAN: There are several things though that I might say about, you know, that might have.... In any case, what Tom was talking about was that I was at Joe Alsop's one night; and I thought the California campaign was going very poorly, and I told the President, that I thought—the President to be—that I thought it was going very poorly. And Bobby Kennedy was there and there were Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], Bobby, Jack Kennedy and maybe one other person...

THOMAS: You were working here in Washington with him.

JOAN: I was head of all women's activity for Bobby, for the presidency. In any case, Bobby—it's one of the few times that he ever really was cross with me—and he looked across the table, and he said, "Joan Braden, if I ever hear you say anything like that again, I'll...." You know, something. And the President, or Jack Kennedy, then turned to Bobby, and he said, "Bobby, listen to her." And so, then I said in what ways I thought that the California campaign was going poorly. And I knew quite a bit about this, not only because of Tom [Thomas Braden], but because of other people I'd known in California.

Then, Bobby said to me one day, "I'm going to California on Wednesday."

O'BRIEN: What did you tell him? Do you recall?

JOAN: What did I say that was going wrong?

O'BRIEN: What was wrong in California?

JOAN: Well, I felt that the purpose, after all, was to elect Jack Kennedy. And that instead of that, there were people fighting their inner battles and were not centering on what we were trying to do, which was to elect Jack Kennedy. And that the Citizens campaign.... That there was a tremendous amount of jealousy that was unnecessary. And I think I was fairly objective about this because in the first place, I was working here and Tom was working in California, so that I was not—I am extraordinarily defensive about Tom—but in this case, I really wasn't, because it had nothing.... I wasn't involved in that.

In point of fact, everything that Jacqueline Kennedy did, I tried to—not only in California, but in all states—to tie in with what they were doing and I had great difficulty in doing it in California because one side was doing one.... The regular, the Democratic Committee was doing one thing and the Citizens another. So I said this. And I think I brought

up at the time—I'd have to think, I think I could think about the specific things that were happening. I think it had to do with Unruh.

THOMAS: Was this the coffee cups and so forth?

JOAN: No. It was much more important than that. It was just that I felt that...

THOMAS: Well, the coffee cups were important. They brought everybody in.

JOAN: No. Well, it was important because things weren't happening fast enough and things were being stopped because, for instance as Tom probably told you, if you're running a citizens committee and you're trying to raise money, you have to have the candidate. I mean, in a political campaign, the most important thing is to have availability of the candidate. And I felt that in California this was particularly being stymied and they did not have the candidate. At the same time, they were trying to raise money. You could argue that there shouldn't have been a citizens committee, but if there was going to be, then you simply had to have the availability of the candidate. And what would have happened was they wouldn't even know.... I knew far more about when Jack Kennedy was going to be in California than the Citizens committee did, and I felt this was wrong.

O'BRIEN: In your associations with Bobby and Jack, and I'm sure you saw Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien, did they ever really sense that kind of loose political structure that you have in California?

THOMAS: Well, I think in that case, in that particular campaign, I think that the people who were running the campaign were politicians' politicians. And it was much easier for them to deal with people like Jess Unruh. I must say I think that they understood completely about Jess Unruh, and they liked him for what he.... And it's a good thing they did. Jess Unruh is a very capable man, but he's a politicians' politician, not an intellectual. And I think that particularly Bobby Kennedy—who after all was running the campaign and was the world's best campaign manager—[it] was easier for him to deal with Jess Unruh. And in this particular case, what finally happened was he said, "All right. You go with me." And in the last.... I'd made the decision not to go because I thought it'd put Tom in a difficult position if I suddenly came from Washington with Robert Kennedy, that this looked as though I were trying to get into the act of who was going to run the California campaign. I mean if I got off the plane with Bobby Kennedy. So I didn't go. And I think that Bobby, at this point (this was very near the end of the campaign) I think he felt that to change the setup then, to try to get in and change things was probably a mistake and that perhaps he'd been wrong, but it was too late to do anything about it.

O'BRIEN: Does Unruh sense that there's some feedback going back to people like yourself and others about the way he was handling the California campaign in 1960? Did you ever get a sense that he was aware of this?

JOAN: I think so. I think that Jess Unruh was so convinced that the Democratic Party had to run the campaign. And there had been that tremendous fight with Paul Ziffren with different factions in the party. I think that Jess Unruh felt, “Okay, there are those of us who were for Jack Kennedy in the beginning, and those people who were for Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] and who were doing other things; they weren’t in on this in the beginning and didn’t know.... I can run this campaign and I’m going to run it. They said they want a citizens committee, all right, let them have the citizens committee, but I don’t want to have anything to do with it.” I mean, that’s what I think he felt.

I thought it was wrong because the only way that I felt that Jack Kennedy was going to win was to bring everybody in, and everyone wasn’t. The Stevenson people for instance, as late as the last campaign when I was women’s chairman for Bobby, those people who we were still having a hard time bringing in, the intellectual Jewish community, the college, you know, it was tough. And I think it was because of the way it was in ’60. And those Stevenson people never were really gotten again.

O’BRIEN: Well, let’s get into that in the Los Angeles area in 1960. Now, you’ve got the central committee, now the chairman that year is Rose, right, Donald Rose. And Rose is an old Stevenson man; and I understand the clubs are basically still pretty hard for those Stevenson people.

JOAN: In the ’60 CDC [California Democratic Council] was still the big thing. It was beginning, though, even in ’60.... Remember our going, with Paul Ziffren there? See, Paul Ziffren and Alan Cranston [Alan M. Cranston] were the beginners of CDC, and they hated Unruh. And so I can remember going and hearing Jack Kennedy speak and sitting next to him afterwards. And Jack Kennedy was not liked by the CDC; Adlai Stevenson was their man. And then, what they finally did, because at this point in history they never were able to control CDC, so they started a whole ‘nother club movement.... In some way....

THOMAS: Unruh did.

JOAN: Yeah.

O’BRIEN: But, now how about people like Rose and this central committee, which is predominantly Stevenson, are they cooperating with the Citizens people, or are they moving into the regular Democratic...

THOMAS: The Stevenson people. The whole idea of the Citizens was—the principal idea of the Citizens which I left out when we talked earlier was to, of course, to get those Stevenson people involved. I remember there was somebody, what was that woman’s name, Maria Macomber, or something like that?

JOAN: Mercedes McCambridge. Yes.

THOMAS: McCambridge. I remember the first meeting of the Citizens, and she cried and cried and cried because Stevenson wasn't the candidate.

JOAN: You see those...

THOMAS: But she was still crying about Adlai at the first meeting to organize the Citizens.

JOAN: If you.... What Don Rose did.... The answer is that those people never were effective Citizens.

O'BRIEN: Oh.

JOAN: In my opinion.

THOMAS: No. I agree with you.

JOAN: I mean, I just think that the thing—that the Kennedy man in California was Unruh. And it wasn't so much President Kennedy or Robert Kennedy as it was Larry O'Brien and Kenny O'Donnell. Now I understand this; he was their kind of man, and this is good. I mean, you know, that was fine. The only thing that was bad, I think, about Unruh in those days was that he was looking obviously toward his own future in California and he wasn't liked because he couldn't take over CDC.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever have any contacts.... I understand Joe Cerrell [Joe R. Cerrell] was doing a lot of detail work for some of the trips in California. Did you ever effectively get in touch with Cerrell? Or did Cerrell ever get in touch with you, or any of the...

JOAN: I mean, I know him, Cerrell, but he was....

THOMAS: No, there was no—there just simply wasn't any liaison. This may have been as much as my fault as it was Jess. It was difficult for me to liaise with Jess because Paul Ziffren, as I pointed out, hated him with a passion and perhaps difficult for Jess to liaise with Paul.... I think Jess made the decision that he was simply going to shut these people out. And, "I won't tell them anything; I won't."
I remember one thing we did for Citizens was we had Adlai Stevenson out to make a speech; and it was a hell of a speech, it was a good speech. And we had it in.... What was the name of that place? Where did we have that speech? Was it in the Palladium?

JOAN: Where we had what, honey?

THOMAS: Where we had that speech. Was it in the Palladium? You weren't there.

JOAN: No. But I know; it doesn't matter; wasn't it in the Greek Theatre?

THOMAS: No. I've forgotten the name of the hall. Anyway, it was not quite filled, which is just unbelievable...

JOAN: The thing is that Jess, at this point I think, saw people like Tom as threats; this is understandable.

O'BRIEN: Sure.

JOAN: I mean now, this is.... After all, if Citizens for Kennedy really took off and became very important, then the guy who was head of it could become a threat to Jess, and perhaps rightfully. But what really didn't happen is that nobody from Washington really coordinated the campaign for Jack Kennedy; the same thing happened for Robert Kennedy. If you're going to run a campaign in a state, then it's got to be run for the candidate and not, in my opinion, for everyone else who happens to be in there.

O'BRIEN: Do you have some more time?

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

JOAN: ...devoted to the Kennedys, you know, and...

O'BRIEN: I'd very much like to.... I don't know whether this is a good....

JOAN: [Interruption]... Because of Nelson Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller], who was a Republican.

O'BRIEN: Okay, well let's start with that. Why did you...

JOAN: What happened was that...

O'BRIEN: Can you go back to some of those early contacts you had? I understand you ran into the Kennedys and met them in Washington.

JOAN: If you want me to I can tell you exactly what happened.

O'BRIEN: Well, please.

JOAN: I was in New York at Marietta Tree's [Marietta Endicott Peabody Tree] and I met Paul Ziffren. Paul Ziffren said to me, "We're going to have a convention in California, will you come to work for me?"

O'BRIEN: Now this is when?

JOAN: This was before, in 1960.

O'BRIEN: This is 1960.

JOAN: It was on Eleanor Roosevelt's [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] birthday, whenever it was; and I'd been to a Roosevelt dinner, and Adlai Stevenson was there. And I went with Adlai Stevenson to Marietta Tree's; and I met Paul Ziffren for the first time. And he said, "Will you come to work for me?" And I said, "I'm sorry, I can't because I'm a Republican and I'm going to work for Nelson Rockefeller." And he said, "But Nelson Rockefeller's not going to run." And I said, "Well, I don't know about that. I've just talked to him and he may." Then he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make a deal with you. If Nelson Rockefeller runs, I'll go for him,"—he was then district committeeman, Paul Ziffren—"and if he does not, you'll come to work for me." And I said, "Okay."

So I was playing golf on a Sunday, and they called me; and it was Nelson Rockefeller. Nelson said to me, "Joanie, I've been all around the country, and I've talked to all the Republican leaders, and I just don't think I can get the nomination, so I'm not going to run." So I said, "Well, I'm sorry you're not." And on Monday morning, Paul Ziffren called, and he said, "Okay, are you going to come to work?" And so I said, "Okay, sure, I will."

And oddly enough, the Kennedys never believed it. But Paul Ziffren believed for whatever reasons—he may have been personally more attracted to Adlai Stevenson, but he didn't think he had a chance—and he told me that there was no question but what Jack Kennedy should be the Democratic nominee. The Kennedys never believed this; I was never able to convince them of this, but I know that he believed this.

In any case, he said, "What I would like you to do, Paul Butler and I have decided to have the acceptance speech in the Coliseum." This holds one hundred thousand people. And he said, "We've had a terrible fight on this. Nobody wants to do it. The potential candidates," (who were Symington [Stuart Symington II]—well, you know who the candidates were) "none of them want to do it; but we want to do it, and your job is to fill it." And so I said, "Okay." So I set about trying to fill the Coliseum. He suggested that I call Symington, call the various people; he suggested that among them I call Robert Kennedy. So I called Robert Kennedy and I said, "My job..." I just said, "Here's my job." And he said, "I don't know who you are. But," he said, "I don't think this can be done. I'm against this." And he said, "I'll just tell you one thing. If my brother speaks to three thousand people, I'll shoot you." Bang! went the telephone.

So I went back to California and said to myself, "I'll do it one way or the other." So I got in touch with every organization. I arranged for buses because they made it free, which I was opposed to, because you know, if you're having something free, you never know who will show up. Whereas if you even charge a dollar, people pay a dollar, and they're much more apt to go. But they had already made this decision and wouldn't change it. And so in order to try and ensure an audience, I had set up a busing system.

In any case, say a week before the Convention, Robert Kennedy came into Paul Ziffren's office, and I was there. I could almost see the look on his face, as though, "You're not even a club woman." You know, "How are you going to do this? Obviously there are not going to be enough people there." But he was extremely nice to me, and he said, "What can I

do to help you? I'll do anything." And he then sent two very efficient girls from Boston. I had been working with whatever volunteers I could get in California, and we had an office in Beverly-Wilshire, and he sent two girls, great girls, down to work full-time. And every day he called back to see how we were getting along and so forth.

And so came the day, and Jack Kennedy did get the nomination, and I went out to the Coliseum at noon. And I'd even gotten the old people who were in wheelchairs. It was suffocatingly hot. And a few people came in. And they had made me keep the doors closed behind what was called the seven-fifty class, where you had to pay, I think it was a thousand dollars or something. These people hadn't arrived, and they wouldn't unlock the gate. So I had a message saying that Jack Kennedy was on his way and that these seats were empty, and this was where the television cameras would go, and there was only one man in the Coliseum who had the power to open these doors, and he wouldn't open them without an okay, and we couldn't find the man. So I found Robert Kennedy, and I said, "Bobby, will you please," you know, "do this because otherwise no matter that there are ninety-two thousand people here, these seats are empty. The people in New York will never know." And Bobby said, "If you will meet my mother, I will see that those doors are open." So I went down to meet Mrs. Kennedy and he went to find the man and saw that the doors were opened and the thing was filled. And it was a success.

And he often said to me afterwards, and I always will remember it, he said, you know, "You did a great job. And it was marvelous that there were ninety-two thousand people there." But he said, "You know, Joan, it's not worth it. The risk is too great. If it had not happened, it would have been so bad for the beginning of the campaign that this kind of risk—it's just not worth it in politics." And I always remembered it. And I think it was right.

O'BRIEN: Well, they were remembering the empty seats with Eisenhower, wasn't it in '56?

JOAN: This, after all, was the first time you had the Convention in California. It was outdoors; it was at this huge place; and you know that there's nothing worse than empty....

O'BRIEN: Being as closely associated with Ziffren as you were, did you ever have any reason to believe that anyone associated with the Kennedys got in on the dumping of Ziffren?

JOAN: No. Because this was done really before the Kennedys. It was Pat Brown who dumped Ziffren.

O'BRIEN: Right. I understand Unruh...

JOAN: Well, obviously. But it was Pat who specifically.... What he did was, when he was...

THOMAS: You were there at the time, weren't you?

JOAN: Yes. When they did it, they wanted to have a non-secret ballot. And Pat is the one who made the decision that it should be a secret ballot; and that's why Paul lost. Had they had to come out and say who was for him and who was against him, I think he probably would have been national committeeman again. And the other thing is, I don't know if you know, Paul not a man who usually speaks without thinking, did speak without thinking outside the Mayflower Hotel here and said what he thought about Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. And then Lyndon Johnson became the nominee for the vice presidency. This further put Paul in a hopeless position. He just hated Johnson, as did Bobby. Bobby wasn't as vulgar as to talk about it. Paul made a statement outside the Mayflower Hotel here, and this further hurt him, I think, in California.

THOMAS: But weren't you there at the time they dumped Paul? Didn't Joe [Joseph Alsop] remember that you sat there and watched them?

JOAN: Oh, that was a meeting in Sacramento. I wasn't there then, but I did see a lot of Paul then. I saw all the—knew all the things that were happening during this time...

O'BRIEN: Right. Go ahead...

JOAN: No, that's all right.

O'BRIEN: Did Kennedy let you in on many of the campaign points of the trips or of the election in the fall, the three major visits Kennedy made there?

JOAN: No. Because I was really working in Washington. And my only reason—I went occasionally with Bobby, but it was all for amusement or for.... I was working in Washington basically. I did go, let's see, did I ever.... I think I might have gone when Mrs. Kennedy.... See I set up.... I did a lot with Mrs. Kennedy, but not so much with the President.

O'BRIEN: Well, what are your contacts then with the Kennedy Administration, Kennedy people in Washington, from that point on?

JOAN: Well, what happened then was the, you probably...

THOMAS: Joan, you'd better tell them about the campaign with Jackie.

JOAN: Well, you probably remember that there was—this is the sort of character of the Kennedys that was so great—that the activist acceptance speech.... You'd think everyone is tired and most candidates, you know, go home to bed. Richard Nixon, I'm sure'd go to bed. Anyway, instead of that, Stash Radziwill [Stanislas Albrecht Radziwill] and Romanoff, Mike Romanoff [Michael Romanoff], had had a bet. Have you been told about this? Do you want me to continue about it?

O'BRIEN: No. Go ahead please.

JOAN: Well, they had a bet. If Jack Kennedy won on the first ballot, then Mike was going to give the party at Romanoff's. And if he did not win on the first ballot Stash was going to give one in England, in London. And he did, you know. So there was a party at Romanoff's. And it was a marvelous party, with caviar, and.... It really was great. And it was that very night. And because I did get the people there, when I came in, it really was great. And they played music for Jack Kennedy, you know. Everybody was great to me because I'd done it; you know, we finally made it, sort of. And Bobby Kennedy, then that night said to me, "Will you come to work for us?" And I said, "Sure." By then I was sold on all Kennedys. And this was, I guess, in June.

And Bobby called me the first of August, I think. And he said, "Will you come?" And I said, "Yes. I will, but I think you ought to know two things: one, did you know that I worked for Nelson Rockefeller for ten years, and two, I'm pregnant." And he said, "Oh, that's great. Come." And I said, "When?" And he said, "Tomorrow." And I said, "But Bobby, I've got all these children, and I'm going to Aspen." "Tomorrow. You can go later to Aspen." And so I said, "Okay." And so I left. And I went to Washington. And then he said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I don't know what I am going to do." And he said, "All right. Tomorrow, I want you to have a list of what you want to do."

And so I sat down and I wrote out a list of things. I'd done a lot of polling with Lou Harris [Louis Harris]—everybody had teased me because every time I'd polled, everybody was for Jack Kennedy—so I decided that the technique of polling could be used as a political, as a way of talking to people about Jack Kennedy; not cheating. It wouldn't be a poll, the knocking on the door and saying, "I'm calling for Kennedy. What do you want to have done? What do you see should be done in America? What are the most important issues facing America?" You know. Then that was one thing I did. And then I had another thing, I suggested that we set up a series of television shows throughout the county in peoples' homes where the two candidates.... When they had the debates.... And that Jackie Kennedy would do the first one, would do each one, and the first one she did do in Hyannis.

THOMAS: That was coffee for Kennedy, wasn't it?

JOAN: No. That was another thing. At least, I've forgotten what we called this. I have all this written down someplace. In any case, I came up with about.... One was a newspaper thing called campaign wife. Because I'd worked for newspapers I thought it would be good if Mrs. Kennedy wrote something or somebody for her, obviously. And then there was the coffee for Kennedy that we did that everybody knew about. But I thought I could remember...

THOMAS: The coffee for Kennedy was a hell of an idea, and it really worked.

JOAN: We used the idea of things that would generate other things. I mean, you had eight people, and those eight people would have twenty people, who'd have more. And for instance in the start of the calling for Kennedy I had a national hookup with Jackie talking to the people who were running it in ten states; television

carried this free. I mean, you know, for that we were always after free.... Oh and then I had.... At the end I arranged a thing, I sort of formed a last coffee of all the coffees for Kennedy; ended up with the time when Jackie Kennedy and President Kennedy would both be having coffee on television and all the parties would be having it.

So anyway, we did a lot of this. And Bobby said, when I said that I'd come up with these ideas, he said, "That's great." And he said, "When can you get started?" This was Friday night. "When can you get this out to all...?" And I said, "Monday." He said, what's the matter with tomorrow?" So I said, "Okay." So I knew there was nobody to type, and no.... Anyway, we did it some way.

This is the great thing about it. He made you want to do it. In some way, nothing was impossible. I mean you'd think, "How could you do it?" Fortunately I can type, but I can't type.... You know, some way you just got everything done because he....

And then the other thing I did, at this moment, a lot of our friends, and this is obviously a very small part, but he had said, "Why...." And you will remember completely inadvertently Jack Kennedy failed to mention Jackie in his acceptance speech, and a lot of our friends said "Why?" There was no reason why. It was that he was talking about America and he just didn't happen to do it. So when I went back, I said, "I think one of the most tremendous assets Jack Kennedy has is his wife." And, you know, people were saying she didn't want to do anything, wouldn't and couldn't and so forth. And I said to Bobby, "I'm just sure this isn't right," and "I would like for everything we do to do with Mrs. Kennedy being the leader of it." And that we should also have, every other week anyway, a tea for the press so they'll have a chance to talk to her. And so we did all those things. And from then on mostly, I mean this was mostly my job was to organize nationwide what was going to happen in those various fields.

THOMAS: Can I interrupt a minute? Didn't I remember your telling me that when you told him about that, that he said it was a good idea, but that he didn't think he could do it, "Would you go talk to her," or something like that?

JOAN: No. That was Jack Kennedy later about going to Lincoln Center. Now, in this case Bobby said, "I'll call her." And he did call her. And she called me and it was fine, you know, we.... From then on everything that she did, I had to do with.

O'BRIEN: I recall seeing some of these on letterhead, I believe the Democratic National Committee letterhead, Women's Division. Was that the same thing?

JOAN: No. You see, I worked immediately for Bobby and had nothing to do with the National Committee. This is interesting because their activities had much more to do with party, strictly the usual party things. The thing that was interesting about this, and I think was the great thing about the Kennedys, is that they had their own style. And their own style insofar as if it could work through the National Committee, they did it. But insofar as the National Committee was set and stodgy, as any

national committee, and wouldn't move. As a matter of fact, I think her name was Price [Margaret Price].

O'BRIEN: Yeah. That's right.

JOAN: Well, in any case, I mean she was fine. But they were used to dealing in the strictly, sort of usual intense politics, and the Kennedys just didn't do things that way. And so when I say that I was interpreter, I got Jim Rose's wife to come in and she was terrific, and Nan MacElroy, who's a newspaperwoman. And they were full-time, and they were just great, they worked as hard as I worked because it was all such fun. And this was the great thing about the Kennedys. And it's hard to do this in a national committee, because they'd after all have been for any Democratic candidate. So that the Kennedys kind of had their own, and by necessity. I must say, that I suppose for this reason we perhaps got more cooperation through Citizens for Kennedy throughout the states than we did from the National Committee. Although this wasn't always true. It depended on who was running them and how interested they were and how much these ideas appealed to them and how much they were for Kennedy.

O'BRIEN: How receptive was Bobby to ideas and some of these things that you...

JOAN: Absolutely, without any question, the most terrific man to work for that I've ever known. His decisions were made [clap] like that. You went in and you said, "I would like to do boom, boom, boom, boom." And he'd say, "Do this, do this, do this. Don't do this. And do this." Over.

O'BRIEN: Almost instinctive.

JOAN: Just like that. All in back of you. Always made a good decision, I think, almost always right; open for argument, but didn't want to be bothered with the argument very long. I mean if he said, "No," and you wanted to do it, he would listen. And he might change, but he didn't want you to stay in there an hour and go over and over it. He was very bright. He looked at all sides very quickly—boom!

O'BRIEN: Who were some of the people at this point in your associations with him who are influential on him?

JOAN: John Seigenthaler. I worked very closely with him. He was right there all the time. And Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] was right.... We were all sort of in that same office.

At that time in that campaign, I would say that they were the ones who were sort of closest to Bobby. Now the other people like Larry, I saw very little of, although they were good friends. I saw very little of Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien because they were working with the President. And I'm sure Bobby saw them. And sometimes I was invited to meetings whenever they all got together, and then I was there. But Bobby's group was more the other.

O'BRIEN: Now Seigenthaler, later, in 1968, becomes very much involved in the California campaign. Where does he get his information on California? Are you particularly informative for him?

JOAN: Well, Tom was very helpful in this. And I think, that this is another thing that was peculiar to the Kennedys, and I think their great strength is that they had a great number of people who were loyal to them personally. I mean they maybe had, I don't know, I'd have to count, but maybe as many as thirty people like myself who would just.... For instance, in '68 I was sent to Indiana, bango! I mean you go when you're asked, you just go; you don't know anything about Indiana, but you learn about Indiana. But your main strength is that you are for them. And this means to them that they can find people in Indiana, but what they wanted was somebody that was their guy. And John Seigenthaler was a guy who was very close to Bobby. I think it was tough for John because....

THOMAS: I don't think John Seigenthaler knew a thing about California. And I don't think it was of any importance at all that he didn't know anything about California. Because he was out there.... He's a first-class mind, first-class organizer, sat there with all phones on his desk, took absolute command, and was in touch with everybody at any time he wanted to be, and then just worked from logic.

JOAN: And, you know, there're very few people.... Like Tom never was this close to the Kennedys and his job was such that he couldn't just take off any time, nor really was he that close to him. He did in '60 because of having just, I mean in '68 he was able to take more time. And I think he was invaluable to John because he did know California politics. But the big thing was that John Seigenthaler could pick up the telephone any minute and get Bobby or get anybody. And this as you know, running a campaign this is....

O'BRIEN: He's really a broker then, isn't he?

JOAN: Yeah.

O'BRIEN: Backing up here a bit, in 1962 in the Brown-Nixon election of 1962, were you at all involved in that? And in a sense were the Kennedys involved in that? Did you happen to get any insight into that problem?

JOAN: See, we were.... Tom, what was I doing then? I remember being in Washington with Mrs. [unclear] when that awful speech of Nixon's.... But why was I not? Did I do anything? I don't even remember whether I did anything for Pat? It wasn't an election that meant a lot to me personally. I mean I liked Pat Brown and obviously didn't want Nixon to win. Oh, yes, I remember, we had several huge parties for Pat and Tom spoke for him and...

THOMAS: I made some speeches, not of great significant importance, and I think we twice had big gatherings in Oceanside for Bernice [Bernice Brown].

JOAN: And one for Pat.

THOMAS: And one for Pat. And we invited everybody in Norte County [Del Norte County].

JOAN: But I didn't really get involved.

THOMAS: And I think Pat Brown carried that part of San Diego, but not the whole.

JOAN: I was then doing some writing. I was also on the Board of Trustees at the Kennedy Center [John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts], and I was spending a lot of time on that and I just didn't get involved. Cared, but didn't get involved.

THOMAS: Was that about the time you were in with Jackie anyway?

JOAN: When did it.... Jack.... '63 or '62?

O'BRIEN: That was '63. I believe it was.

JOAN: Anyway, I was involved, as I say, in other things. And thought I was interested, I just didn't do anything.

O'BRIEN: No contact with Unruh during elections 1962 or insight into that?

JOAN: Well, that was interesting. I was no threat to Unruh, Unruh and I have always been very good friends. And he from time to time has asked me to do—I mean, for instance, in 1968, amazingly enough asked me to be women's chairman. We've always been very good friends; I'm extremely fond of him.

I think Tom had a tough time, too, because he was, after all, a newspaperman. And he had often to make—during the years he was in California—he all the time was not a politician, but I think a very good newspaperman—so he had to make objective judgments, and they were often not in favor of Jess. And this, you know, was sort of an addition to, I think, Jess' feeling that Tom was a political threat. That it was also true that I... In fact, I remember when Tom ran for office and being with Bobby and Bobby called Jess and said, you know, "Will you come out for Tom?" And Jess said, you know, "I like Joanie, and I like Tom, but," he said, "when the chips are down, Tom Braden has never been on my side." You know, after all Pat had appointed Tom to the School Board [California State Board of Education], and Tom is a newspaperman, and he often thought was wrong. So.

O'BRIEN: Sure. Is there anything that stands out to you during the Administration and your contacts with the Kennedys? Now, I'm sure the trip with

Jacqueline Kennedy to India is one. But is there anything else?

JOAN: Well, I worked a lot with the President and certainly with Jackie on the Kennedy Center.

O'BRIEN: Right. Would you care to go into some of that? Is there...

JOAN: If you want me to.

THOMAS: Tell him the story—I think it's a good story—about the pumpkins.

JOAN: Oh, well, there're several sort of amusing stories about.... See, I.... After the election then the question was what to do. And I immediately thought, decided and thought, "Oh I'd love to do everything." Then I realized that after all, I was married to a man who lived in California, and I had eight children. See Tommy Braden [Thomas W. Braden III] and John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] were born about the same time, so all through the campaign Jackie and I were equally pregnant, and this was a kind of bond. So after he was elected, she was always very sweet and always asked me to come to the White House and bring one or any of the children. So I saw a great deal of her then. And as I couldn't.... During the campaign, I had sort of molded her in my image since I was interested in politics and interested in this kind of thing, and she wasn't.

After she became First Lady, then she asked me to do things that were really more in her line than in mine. I know very little about music; I enjoy it, but I don't know very much about it. And one of the things, as you know, that she wanted to do was to encourage interest in the country in opera and music and so forth. So I was working on the then Cultural Center [National Cultural Center] and held her proxy. So I spent a lot of time doing this.

One of the times that I—I'll use the thing that Tom was talking about—one of the funny things was that I was, right after the, I guess it was the Bay of the Pigs or the, whichever, I don't remember, whatever, it was in October...

O'BRIEN: The October missile crisis.

JOAN: The October missile crisis. I happened to be there with Susan [Susan Braden]. Susan and Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] had made a pumpkin, and it had a great happy face. We'd just finished it and the President called and he hadn't been home for, or hadn't been in that part of the White House for overnight or a couple of nights while he was working.... He called and apparently Jackie said that I was there. And he very kindly said that he wished I'd stay. And so I did stay, and when he came in the children were about to put the pumpkin on the balcony. And he said, "Don't do that. They'll think it's Castro [Fidel Castro]." [Laughter]

And then another funny thing happened once. I again resumed my role of being interested in politics and I felt Jackie should do a little more for the country. And so the summer before he died I was in Newport one weekend. The music center was going to open or they were going to break ground and they wanted Jackie to come when Lincoln Center was opening. And so as we sat down to dinner with Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings],

the President, Jackie, and me. The President turned to me and he said, "Well, Joanie, what do you think? Do you think she ought to go to New York to the new Lincoln Center, or the music center?" I said, "Well, I think she ought to do both. She hasn't done much in this country." Then he turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and he said, "You ask her." Then we got into a little thing about the, you know, whether she would or not. And then it was—if I can remember—was if it would fit in her calendar and so forth. And she didn't much want to do it, particularly the California thing. And Mrs. Chandler was in a difficult position, because it was during the Brown-Nixon.

O'BRIEN: Right.

JOAN: And Mrs. Chandler didn't really want the President, she wanted Jackie. And I was amused by this, and amused at my role in it because I was constantly being called. So the President said to me, as he went off to bed, he said, "Well, Joanie, you don't suppose Mrs. Chandler would want me and Little John? Ha! Ha!" You know. And it gave me an idea. So I called Tish Baldrige [Letitia Baldrige] and said, "I would suggest that you..." No, I called, I guess I called Mrs. Chandler and said that the way, that I'd found out, that really to ask Mrs. Kennedy, in this instance that obviously the chances of the President coming were very little, but it should be extended to both of them, knowing that the chances were the President would go and Mrs. Kennedy wouldn't. In any case it was funny, because unfortunately, when the time came, it was during either the October missile crisis or during the Bay of Pigs, so neither one of them did.

But in any case, the Lincoln Center, she did agree to go. And he called me and asked me if I would go with her saying she didn't want to go unless I could go. That was funny because that was during the Rockefeller and Morgenthau [Robert M. Morgenthau] election. And as I've told you, Nelson Rockefeller is perhaps my oldest friend. And they did not want—he was also the governor of the State of New York—and Pierre Salinger was extremely, vehemently interested in her not having her picture taken with Nelson. And he called me, and he said, "I don't understand it, but Jackie said you can handle it and she won't let me go; and if this happens, it'll ruin us; you just can't let it happen." And this was a little bit difficult in fact, because John Rockefeller, also a friend, came to take us. So there was John Rockefeller and Jackie and me, and you know, how do you avoid it? But the way we did it was we had a small reception afterwards with no politics. It was just the people who had to do with Lincoln Center. And then there was that funny thing about...

THOMAS: Besides this, Nelson, I think, might well have...

JOAN: Oh, Nelson was great about things like.... I mean he didn't care about having his picture taken. I mean, you know. But it was one of those awkward and funny things. And then it was funny because that was that disastrous night when Lennie Bernstein [Leonard Bernstein] kissed Jackie on television and made her so cross. And he afterwards said to me, "All the time, Joanie, I was planning the Gloria I was going 'I will not kiss Jackie Kennedy. I will not kiss Jackie Kennedy.'" And then he said, "I did." Anyway she got over it.

THOMAS: She was very hurt; she felt genuinely about it.

O'BRIEN: Is that right? Well, getting into the election in '66, we talked about it a little bit in regard to Bobby's involvement. Can you recall anything else pertaining to his involvement in that, in your...

JOAN: You mean in the Brown-Nixon...

O'BRIEN: Right. In Brown-Nixon, not Brown-Nixon, but Brown-Reagan [Ronald Reagan] and also your race.

JOAN: Tom's?

THOMAS: No. I don't think.... I mean it would have been pleasant if he'd been very involved in my race for me, but I don't see, you know, there was no....

JOAN: I had that famous talk with him outside the Senate Office Building. Bobby would've been all for Tom, would've done, I think, anything, done anything he could. But once Lloyd Hand [Lloyd N. Hand] came into the race, Bobby felt, quite rightly that Tom didn't have a chance. And I didn't really want to talk to him about this, because I knew this. But being now brought up by the Kennedys, it was annoying to me to have him tell me this because, after all we were in it. So it seemed to me not very helpful to talk about it. I mean obviously, we had to go on as though there was a chance.

And on the other hand, I think Bobby, quite realistically, felt that no matter what he did, Tom could not be nominated, given a three-way race, and given the fact of the temper of California in general.

And Tom, at that point, or very recently had been in as you know, a big thing with Rafferty [Max L. Rafferty]. And this was the sort of a blue-collar worker that elected Ronald Reagan, I think. And I think Bobby was very.... You know there's no better politician in the world. [Interruption]

THOMAS: On the other hand there's ways that Bobby did contribute to my campaign. He made a lot of telephone calls for me to people in California to contribute; he got them to contribute. He was as helpful as could be without getting into it; and I don't see how he possibly could have gotten into it. However, he was, as Joanie points out, very rational about the fact—as soon as Lloyd Hand entered the race it was over.

My own feeling on that is a strong one; there again was Jess. Jess and I.... Jess persuaded Lloyd Hand to enter the race. That's not an accusation, that's fact; I mean Lloyd said so. He called him on the phone and did everything possible to get him into that race because he was pretty sure that I would be damaged. And that he did want.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any insight into Bobby and—let's take Pat Brown over the years from 1960 on to '66?

THOMAS: Oh, sure. What Bobby thought of Pat Brown?

O'BRIEN: Yeah. Right. And his way of operation and style...

THOMAS: He thought he was a bumbling fool.

O'BRIEN: Is that a pretty consistent attitude right on to....

THOMAS: Consistently, yeah, consistently. It all began with Pat's wavering about whether to endorse Jack and Pat's, I think, genuine affection for Stevenson. Stevenson came and stayed with Pat and Bernice at the Mansion one night. And, you know, Pat's a genuine sort of fellow. You know Pat?

O'BRIEN: Yeah, I've met him.

THOMAS: Well, he's the kind of fellow who'd say to you, "Tom, you know that happened to me last week? I went to Washington, and I went to dinner, and you know who was there and I talked to him? Dean G. Acheson." You know, like a ten year old. Marvelous. Just marvelous. Pat's a genuine boy and like a genuine boy can't quite make up his mind about lots of things such as who you're going to support. And I think Pat's wavering on Stevenson, which he continued all the way through the convention, just shot him as far as the Kennedys were concerned. They never, never liked him. And I think that was an additional reason why they felt that their support, their strength, everything they were going to do in California was going to be Jess.

O'BRIEN: Do you think the President shared this view of Pat Brown?

JOAN: No, less. Although, the Browns were never invited in the White House. Pat Brown was not a man....

THOMAS: Let's take the Browns. He was the Democratic governor of California, and probably, I think Bernice once told me, the only Democratic governor in the United States who was never invited to the White House.

JOAN: But I don't think this is such a purposeful thing. I think Jack Kennedy had much more of a broad interest in anything anyone had to say, whereas Robert Kennedy had very little time in the world—"Let's get on." I mean, for instance Jack Kennedy would always say to me when I'd come from California, "Now tell me what..." As you know, obviously he got much more important information or any information from anyone he wanted; but he was really interested in my point of view, I, being representative of no one. And when Tom came back from—I've forgotten where you'd been—Israel or someplace, you know, he wanted to know, he said, "What do you think we ought to do there?" I mean he really cared about everyone's opinion. Whereas Bobby picked

very carefully whose opinion he wanted, and he didn't have time. Bobby's whole life was, "Let's move."

O'BRIEN: Well, how about Bobby on Jess Unruh?

JOAN: I think Bobby liked Jess, recognized him for what he was, for his usefulness, would not have chosen to spend an evening having dinner with him and chatting about the state of the world but found him extremely useful in California and...

THOMAS: Only at the end of his own campaign did he realized that Unruh might be hurting him.

JOAN: But Bobby understood Jess. And also Bobby lived in Washington and Jess lived in California. It wasn't something that he had to deal with all the time. And I think he knew Jess was important to him.

O'BRIEN: Did he have respect for his political judgment?

JOAN: Yes. I think so. But I don't think he would have taken it only.

THOMAS: Well, I recall a time in the '68 campaign, the primary in California, when Bobby called me, and there'd been a story in the newspaper about McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] taking.... McCarthy made a speech against Jess. Bobby called from somewhere or other—I'm not sure if it was Indiana or where—and said, "I see McCarthy's going to run against Unruh." And I said, "Yeah, it looks like that." And he said, "Well, get out and do something right away. Get out and start a citizens movement. Hire yourself a headquarters and broaden the base. We can't have McCarthy running against Unruh." And I didn't do it. I didn't do what he told me to do, because his own people that he sent out there, well Chuck Spalding [Charles Spalding] and Tony Achers didn't want to do it.

JOAN: You know it was awfully...

THOMAS: It was a sad thing because neither Chuck nor.... Actually there are just so many things you should do because.... You know you get bad advice. But Spalding and Achers were lost; they were terrible; they were unbelievably bad guys to run a campaign in California. Bobby finally found this out and they both sort of disappeared.

JOAN: But this is understandable in the case of Jack Kennedy. This national campaign was put together over a period of time. In the case of Robert Kennedy this was put together overnight. And so these thirty or more people I mentioned of varying degrees of competence but all with extraordinary loyalty, were called upon in a pinch. And I'm sure you've heard it said a million times that if only Robert

Kennedy had a Robert Kennedy for a campaigner manager.... I mean you heard that in state, in a senatorial election; and it was said many, many times; and it was absolutely true. But in the long run, when I went out to Indiana it was just incredible. I mean here you had an office with two secretaries and me and no one from Indiana.

O'BRIEN: Getting on to this thing in California in '68. How about Walter Sheridan [Walter J. Sheridan]? How did Sheridan get involved out there? Did Sheridan know what was going on?

THOMAS: Walter Sheridan. In '68?

JOAN: Yeah. I knew Walter very well. He was in Indiana, and he came to Indiana. Walter and I.... As a matter of fact, one of things that I did in Indiana which was interesting—and I must say made an absolute lasting impression upon me and might have even if Bobby hadn't been killed—was I was responsible for the rally which happened to be the night that Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] was killed. And on that night, well here we were in this office, number one. When I arrived in Indiana there were two people from Boston and a couple of secretaries and Walter Sheridan and me. And nobody from Indiana—a couple of young kids wandered in. And I was told in the beginning that they, Teddy, wanted three black rallies: one in Gary and two in Indianapolis. And as you know the Kennedys worked very strong and rightfully on registration; and they wanted this both as a thank you for registration and also in order to register more. We had a discussion about this. I thought it was too many and that they were going to lose the blue-collars and we ought to limit it to possibly one. And then in the middle of all this Senator Kennedy decided to come to Indiana. So then it seemed that without any question you should have one rally and not try to do more at this moment. So we decided on the one rally.

Walter Sheridan and I were the ones who were sort of doing it. And the night of the thing, I remember being in the headquarters and Walter was at the park. And all during the day the mayor of Indianapolis had been saying that he had put a cordon—is that how you pronounce it?—around and that it was extremely dangerous and that trouble was expected, and that he advised no one to go near. And at the same time we were sent putting out leaflets and trying to organize groups to go to the rally.

So it got to be, I've forgotten the timing, but maybe it was going to be 7:30 and Bobby was going to come to the headquarters first and then go to the rally. And it got to be 8:30, and Bobby was still in Gary, on his way. And you can imagine people standing, it was cold outside, you know—"Where is he?"—and everybody was like this. And Pierre called and he said, "Joanie, don't show any emotion; don't say anything. I just want you to know that Martin Luther King has been shot. Should the President come, I mean, should Bobby come, please stop him. Call me—don't let him, whatever you do—go to the rally. I'll call you back when I know more," and "Don't say this to anyone." And he said then, "You and Walter Sheridan should keep in close communication." We had sort of a walkie-talkie.

So then at about.... Bobby was about two hours late. Then Pierre called back and said he'd died. Then, after they got in touch with Bobby, before he got to the headquarters, he made his own decision to go directly to the rally. So Adam Walinsky came by and picked me

up. And I can remember starting off in the police car with the sirens, and Adam, quite wisely said, “Look. No sirens because this would just,” you know. Then the said to me, “Are you sure you want to go? Anything could happen.” And I said, I felt, well, Bobby’s going to go, why shouldn’t I go? So I said, “Sure. I want to go.” So I went. And it was a place, a round place with apartments. Maybe you were there. Do you know?

O’BRIEN: No.

JOAN: Well, there were people hanging out of windows. There wasn’t one white face, not one. And there were people hanging out of windows. It was freezing cold, and even though May it was still quite cold. I think it was April. And they had transistor radios and they were beginning to get news about Martin Luther King. I don’t think they knew yet he was dead, but they knew he had been shot. And I can remember arriving maybe three minutes before Bobby and a man who had been.... By then we had some Indiana people and I had tried to get as many local officials on a sort of truck thing and so.... Anyway he was with me and he said, “Come on the truck.” And I said, “No. I don’t want to do that because there won’t be room. I’ll stand right here.” And so there was this very black Negro man with a red stocking cap who took my hand and held it against the truck so I could stand. Then Bobby came in. And I can remember looking at my hand and his hand and the fact that there was not another white person in the whole place and then watching Bobby stand up and knowing how vulnerable he was, you know. It was the first time he ever mentioned his brother, you know. Once before in California he had mentioned the Warren Commission Report, but he had never mentioned his brother’s death in public. And he said, “As you remember that night that my brother was killed by....”

THOMAS: “My brother was killed by a white man.”

JOAN: Anyway. But I can remember that moment of thinking of how it was all sort of right there, I mean all that everybody had been talking about. And the people, the blacks were so orderly and kind and so obviously moved. And then it was over, and Bobby left. And I had the ghastly feeling, “My God. How am I.... What’s going to happen—just a sea of black faces—what’s going to happen to me!” And I didn’t know anybody. I might have felt the same if it had been a sea of white faces, but anyway somebody took me and we went back to the hotel and then later that night I sat in on a meeting when Bobby was deciding what to do, whether to go to Louisiana where he faced Garrison [Jim C. Garrison] and might be subpoenaed and was worried about that; whether to do nothing; whether to continue his schedule and so forth. And we batted it around and I didn’t have much to.... It wasn’t my opinion that was very much sought. But in any case, we all sort of threw this around. And then later Bobby came to my room for a minute and it was the only time he ever mentioned it. I remember him loosening his tie and sitting back and saying, “My God. It might have been me.” It’s the only time that I ever heard him mention it.

O’BRIEN: Well, in that realm of discussions as to what to do, who was carrying, in a sense, carrying that discussion?

JOAN: I think everyone had something to say about that. I can tell you who was there. And everybody said something. You know, even I, everybody maybe had a comment. There were Frank Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz], Pierre Salinger, George Stevens, Dick Wilson. Larry wasn't there either....

O'BRIEN: Was Adam?

JOAN: Well, Adam, I'm sure because I'd seen him earlier. I just can't remember what he had to say about it. Adam I think. I don't remember whether Jeff Greenfield was there. I don't remember Walter—he was certainly in Indiana, but I don't remember Walter being in that meeting—I don't think he was. I don't think Ted was there. Let's see who else, Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton]. I think that was about it. It was a small group of people. I was trying to think of Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel], but I don't think he was.

O'BRIEN: Passing back over that back to California—Unruh organized California a little differently than it's been organized before in the Robert Kennedy campaign, as I understand by county rather than north-south. Did you get any insight into why and the way that worked?

THOMAS: Well, it seemed to me that what Unruh did was to set up a campaign headquarters and a campaign that could be transferred to him for his own gubernatorial campaign, which is now still coming up. He got some money, he had his own money which he didn't spend—out of the counties at once. He demanded and received—I don't know that he received—I know that, yes. He did demand and he did receive the money to set up the whole thing. And he put his own people in charge and organized a campaign for Robert Kennedy, one which was planned to move right over to his own campaign. And I think on the whole the people he got in there were first-rate. The guy he had up in San Francisco was a hell of a... [Interruption] The fellow that Unruh put up in San Francisco as underdog was the only really major mistake. The press guy in Los Angeles was pretty weak. But he's a good organization....

JOAN: But, Tom, I think there are more reasons than that, honestly.

THOMAS: More reasons than what?

JOAN: Than what you, I mean.... For one thing, I think, Jess was always very weak in northern California, and this campaign had to be run.... I mean, whether it was going to be Jess running for governor or somebody running for Senate or anything—I mean certainly we learned that—there was no way for somebody.... I mean if you lived in the south and your reputation was made in the south then you're not known in the north. Or if you're Alioto [Joseph L. Alioto].... No, Alioto is known every place. But a man who makes his reputation in the north is known there. In California—I was talking to Nelson Rockefeller yesterday about New York—and California is even more true; it's like running for a national rather than a state office. I mean the states are so big and

the characters of people are so different in the various parts of the state, that it's not like running in Connecticut or Massachusetts or any other state, Indiana. I mean you have the whole, you know, in California. How can you appeal to Cesar Chavez or the grape growers and at the same time appeal to the San Francisco....

O'BRIEN: Well, do Alioto and those people feel shut out of this, or are they shut out of this? Let's put it this way.

JOAN: Out of what?

O'BRIEN: Out of the campaign, the Robert Kennedy campaign in 1968.

THOMAS: No. Not at all.

JOAN: Not at all. They would have loved it and this was the sad thing. You see, I think that we could have done a lot better in California if we could have just been for the moment for Robert Kennedy. And as that was my interest it was very easy for me, and for Tom, too. I think it should have been for everyone. But unfortunately people who.... And Bobby understood this. This was what was one of his great qualities; I mean he knew that everybody else were for him, but they also wanted to get elected themselves. But Alioto was all for Bobby. And I tell you where this made a difference was money. Because.... Excuse me.

O'BRIEN: But aren't some of these people in a sense shut out of a campaign organization?

THOMAS: Well, they were. Yeah.

JOAN: They never took a major role.

THOMAS: And they tried to. But it's odd because the people that were then for Alioto—a lot of them were the people that were my guys—were the people that were for me in northern California. This was particularly true.... There were two fellows, one was Leydecker [Byron W. Leydecker] and the other one was Becker [Alan D. Becker]. Both just extraordinarily able young guys who thought of themselves as Alioto people. Actually, they're now Unruh people due to events, but at that time they very much wanted.... And Ruby Smith was another one; she came to me with all the Stevenson crowd. But they very much wanted to be in the campaign for Bobby Kennedy, and they were for Bobby Kennedy a 100 percent.

There were Alioto people for Bobby Kennedy, but they couldn't get into the campaign. Now, they couldn't get into the campaign because Jess didn't want them to because he realized they were Alioto people.

JOAN: Oddly enough in Tom's campaign, he, I think, came as close as anyone to the emotional to the fervor that was around Stevenson. I mean a lot of

these people felt this way about Tom. I mean, they all sort of came back in this and they could have been delivered for Robert Kennedy. A lot of this was the Jewish intellectual, not the liberalite is a word that you almost oughtn't use any more because you know—but the people who really cared and had no axes to grind but wanted to be for someone and were not so against.... All of these people were, and unfortunately even though I think Unruh tried, but it was very difficult. I mean he tried up to a point, but he didn't want them to.... You know, it was okay with someone like me who wasn't going to be a threat, but when it came to somebody who might be a threat, then couldn't quite make the.... If Bobby had lived, then maybe we could have, you know, but you see these people would never have worked for Jess, ever.

O'BRIEN: You know, I think in this decision that Bobby Kennedy makes in regard to working around Unruh at the very last....

JOAN: Oh, but Bobby had to make an immediate decision when he went, when he decided to run; he didn't have any choice; he had to go with whoever he though could do the most for him the quickest.

O'BRIEN: A little while later, after you get the call, you know, to start the Citizens organization...

THOMAS: Unruh. Which I didn't do.

O'BRIEN: Right. Was Paul Treg in on that?

THOMAS: Yeah. He would have been. I had meetings with Paul Treg. And I fussed around about whether to start this headquarters probably for two days, and at one point I would rent a thing and then I would cancel it. I did a bum job on it simply because...

JOAN: You didn't do a bum job...

THOMAS: Too many things pulling at me.

JOAN: No. I think we all decided it was a mistake. It was too late to do it.

O'BRIEN: But the next day...

THOMAS: But Bobby wanted it done.... At this point....

JOAN: But it was too late. And we knew, in this case I think, more than he...

THOMAS: Maybe we knew more than he...

JOAN: I mean, here I was—state chairman of women. Tom...

THOMAS: But I knew that...

JOAN: ...starts a committee...

THOMAS: What was going to happen was that Unruh was going to just.... The thing is, the thing would have blown up; there was Braden with another Citizens committee....

JOAN: Well, it was also with me, women's chairman, and getting along very well with the people who were the party people.... Now I can't even remember his.... Art Seltzer [Arthur Seltzer] and I became great friends. And I was really upset about this, upset enough to call and talk because I was under the impression that what they wanted out of me was to try to bring these people in. And there was a guy named Bill Norris, a lawyer. All the bright people were for Tom, honestly.

O'BRIEN: And these were basically northern California people?

THOMAS: No.

JOAN: Yeah. Los Angeles. They were all ready to go to work.

THOMAS: Southern, too.

JOAN: And I had gotten a lot of these people into.... I had done it by talking to Art Seltzer and having him trust me. And at the same time that Art Seltzer was trusting me, here I was also being told, because of Tom, about all these other plans—I thought this was dirty politics—so that it was a messy thing. And it was too late, this was the primary; we had like, you know, a month to go. Why set up something that....

O'BRIEN: Well, who's getting to Bobby Kennedy, in a sense, criticizing on the way the operations is going on?

JOAN: Getting to Bobby was not very difficult ever, or Jack Kennedy. A great quality they had: "No matter how busy, you could get to me." I could have gotten to them any minute and did, said what I thought was happening.... The sort of group, Frank Mankiewicz came out and Seigenthaler were there, whose lives were more or less...

THOMAS: Well, wait a minute. To be logical about this. Once the decision had been made and went back to Bobby that no we weren't going to do what he asked us to do and that that wasn't the way to do it, then he moved; and he sent out Seigenthaler and Mankiewicz...

JOAN: And Steve.

THOMAS: ...and Steve Smith because he was convinced, I think, of two things: number one, that the Unruh thing was not working and might even bounce around so it turned against him, because of a lot of young able bright guys who just wouldn't join the Unruh or couldn't—more the latter, weren't allowed in. You know, there was a big fight up in San Francisco with Byron Leydecker walking into the headquarters, taking it over for two days, and then pretty soon the money froze up—and he couldn't.... It was just impossible to get in on. And at that point, I think, Bobby said, "All right, I've got to do something." So he sent out Seigenthaler and Mankiewicz and relegated...

JOAN: And Steve.

THOMAS: And Steve, and relegated Spalding and Achers to the second hold.

JOAN: I think he felt at this point with so little time he'd have people that were not intimately involved in California politics to try to sort of get this thing off the ground. And they had a Gallup that was supposed to be given—which again I kept telling people of the advice I'd gotten from Bobby about the Coliseum—it was just a mistake. It was just too big a thing, and if it failed it was going to be too drastic; and if successful, it wasn't that important. And in this case, as opposed to the other case, it wasn't really successful; and then it hurt rather than helped him. I mean they had to give away tickets, and you know. And the whole thing was...

THOMAS: That was Chuck Spalding's job when he came out here.

O'BRIEN: Where's Bill Orrick [William Horsley Orrick, Jr.] in all this?

THOMAS: Nowhere.

JOAN: He's taking very little...

THOMAS: He's staying in San Francisco running his law office.

JOAN: ...against Unruh. And would not, you know.... He was going to be chairman, in fact, wasn't he chairman for a while?

THOMAS: I've forgotten. But he was dinner chairman for the dinner I gave...

JOAN: But there was a moment when he was going to be northern California chairman. Yeah, and Jess vetoed it. Something happened. I don't remember. You should talk to him. I mean, I don't remember...

THOMAS: You know Orrick pretty much stayed out of it. He was pleasant and if you

asked him to do something, he'd do it; but he didn't want to be in...

JOAN: But he was a non-Unruh. I think it's important not to knock Unruh too much in all this because he—I mean after all, at the moment that Bobby decided to run I don't know who else he would have called who could have gotten, who had as many forces. You see, Unruh over the years had to build up an organization. Now, whether you liked the organization or not, it's beside the point, he had one. And I don't know anybody else who had a state-wide organization.

THOMAS: Absolutely right.

JOAN: So that I think it's very important to not just say, "Well, he was a terrible guy," and you know....

THOMAS: Yet on the other hand to that must be added that story that I remember of.... Not a story but a fact that I remember that balances in a way...

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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