ON MAY 1979, STEVEN KNOLL ’79 SAT WITH HIS CLASSMATES IN THE SENATE. BERNARD KENNEDY'S ASSUMPTION COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS. STEVE UNHURRIEDLY WANTED TO SATISFY HIS LIFE'S WISH. BUT WHAT WAS IT TO REFRESH YOUR LIFE WITH THE MEETING OF THE SPEAKER?


"MY ASSUMPTION PROFESSORS CHALLENGED ME TO STEP OUTSIDE OF THE WORLD I LIVED IN, WHICH IS WHAT A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION IS ALL ABOUT."

STEVE WAS ADMITTED TO ASSUMPTION BY THE MILLER CENTER PROJECT AND ALSO AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA. HE OVERSEES THE RONALD REAGAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, WHICH WAS FOUNDED IN 2002.

"OFTEN, STEVE CHERISHES HIS ASSUMPTION EDUATION AND EXPERIENCE. "I HAVE NOTHING BUT FOND MEMORIES OF ASSUMPTION," HE EXPLAINED. "I HAVE MAINTAINED FRIENDSHIPS WITH SEVERAL CLASSMATES, AND WE OFTEN GET TOGETHER AND REMEMBER OUR TIMES TOGETHER."

STEVE'S CAREER INCLUDED A SIX-YEAR STINT AT THE JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY IN BOSTON, WHERE HE MET MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOW BEING INTERVIEWED BY THE MILLER CENTER FOR THE KENNEDY PROJECT. HE ALSO PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

IN 2001, AS THE CENTER OPENS THE RONALD REAGAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, DR. STEVEN KNOLL WAS INVITED TO JOIN THE MILLER CENTER. "I HAVE STUDIED THE PRESIDENCY, AND THIS POSITION ALLOWS ME TO INTERVIEW SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN HISTORY AND KEEP RECORDS OF THEIR RECOLLECTIONS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS," HE STATED. "OUR INTERVIEW SESSIONS ARE DESIGNED TO CAPTURE THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF EACH PRESIDENCY AND PROVIDE A PERSPECTIVE ON THE TIMES." WE HAVE OFTEN DISCOVERED THAT THE PRESS ACCOUNTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION ARE NOT COMPLETE. IN ADDITION TO FILLING IN THE GAPS IN THE DOCUMENTARY RECORD, WE ALSO TRY TO FILL IN THE GAPS LEFT BY THE MEDIA.

"FOR MANY OF OUR INTERVIEWEES, GIVING THEIR ORAL HISTORY CAN BE AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE. IF NOT, THEN I'VE HAD TO STOP AN INTERVIEW TO ALLOW AN INTERVIEWEE TO REGAIN THEIR COMPOSURE—for many of them, their time in the White House was the best years of their lives."

THE MILLER CENTER IS THE ONLY INSTITUTION IN THE COUNTRY DOING THIS WORK, AS THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND THE PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES NO LONGER CONDUCT ORAL HISTORIES. THE HISTORIES ON THE REAGAN HISTORY PROJECT ARE FUNDING THEM THROUGH THE RESPECTIVE PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY FOUNDATIONS. THE MILLER CENTER MAINTAINS ITS SCHOLARLY INDEPENDENCE FROM THESE, BUT THEIR INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIPTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC.

"AMERICA'S WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF TOLD US TO TAKE THE TIME TO INTERVIEW IMPORTANT PERSONS FROM BOTH PARTIES, AND THE CELL PHONE MEANS THAT FUTURE GENERATIONS OF HISTORIANS WILL HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE STORY WITHOUT THESE ORAL RECORDS."

"STEVE HAS INTERVIEWED MANY CABINET MEMBERS AND OFFICIALS, AS WELL AS CONGRESSMEN AND FOREIGN LEADERS DURING HIS CAREER. AMONG OTHERS, GIVING THEIR ORAL HISTORY CAN BE AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE."

"ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION I'VE HAD TO STOP AN INTERVIEW TO ALLOW AN INTERVIEWEE TO REGAIN THEIR COMPOSURE—for many of them, their time in the White House was the best years of their lives," he said. "My experience with both Democratic and Republican interviewees has reaffirmed my faith in the American system, as naive as that sounds. The more we learn about these men and their experiences, the more we understand our country and the importance of the public good. The public servants who have come to us have shared their stories and the lessons learned from them.

"The Kennedy Project is scheduled to last another 5 years, and we are interviewing individuals on the Senate aspect. It's a fascinating project, and I feel it is all the more so because of my attachment to and affection for Massachusetts."