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Interview with Ed Kelly

Date: 11 December 2003

Location: Forty-seventh Ward Committeeman's Office, Chicago, IL.

Present: Ed Kelly and Dr. Fred W. Beuttler

Fred W. Beuttler: Well why don't we begin? We're in the committee office.

Ed Kelly: This is the former committeeman's office.

FWB: We're with Ed Kelly. You were the Ward Committeeman for the Forty-seventh Ward.

EK: Right.

FWB: Okay. We're here to talk about primarily your relationship with Mayor Daley, the first Mayor Daley. When did you first meet the Mayor?

EK: Well, when I was at the Park District as a physical instructor, I used to run basketball camps and baseball camps. I got a call one day that the City wanted to do some basketball camps from the Park District. I was assigned over there to do it. That's when I first met the Mayor. He was the sponsor of the basketball camps. In 1968, I was going to go to Milwaukee as the president of the Milwaukee Bucks. A young man whom I'd met at an early age became the owner of a new franchise, the Milwaukee Bucks team. His name is Wes Pavlon. I was, at that time, the superintendent of Lincoln Park.

I spent, by the way, thirty eight years with the Park District. I started out as a physical instructor and eventually became a general superintendent. I received a call from Mayor Daley's office that the Mayor wanted me to come down to his office to see him. And I couldn't understand why the Mayor of Chicago wanted to see me. I went to his office to see him and he asked me to run for Ward Committeeman of the Forty-seventh Ward. The present committeeman, George Wells, had cancer and the Mayor was looking

for someone to replace him. And I sat with him for two hours. I never mentioned that I was going to Milwaukee. Years later, I found out that he knew I was leaving.

To cut a long story short, he talked me into running for ward committeeman. I went home and told my wife, "We're not going to Milwaukee. I'm going to run for ward committeeman." I wasn't really interested in the political field at all. My background, pretty much, was coaching. I loved sports; I played a lot of sports, and things of that nature. So the next thing I know, I'm in the campaign running for ward committeeman. A senator, who had been a senator for seventeen years by the name of Senator Jim Lucas, decided he was going to run against me. And it became a very difficult situation because I didn't have any money. We had a hundred dollars in the bank. The Mayor wanted to help me and I turned him down. I had never ever asked Mayor Daley for any personal favor for me or my family, ever. I want to go on record right now. But he was so kind.

Anyway, I ran and I won. And at that time, I had just gone down to the Park District as administrative aide. I was promoted from park supervisor to administrative aide to the president of the Park District, William McFetridge. I won the election and became ward committeeman in 1968. I became extremely active in the political arena here in Chicago. The ward was predominately German. The alderman was John Hoellen, who was the Republican alderman for twenty-some years, and his father prior to him. The people of the Forty-seventh Ward, were predominately a German population -- was the biggest German populated ward in the city. And all they knew was the name of Hoellen. Of course, here's an Irishman coming in, trying to change all of these Republican votes to Democratic votes. I was fortunate enough eventually that I did do that.

My relationship with the Mayor became extremely close. In 1972, I was a committeeman for four years and the Mayor made me the slate picking chairman for Cook County, which was pretty [big] because I was still a rookie as a committeeman.

The mayor selected me a slatemaking chairman in 1972. When I became the General Superintendent of the Chicago Park District, the mayor became very active, appearing at all of our new park field houses, swimming pools, boxing programs, and any other sporting events. I had opened 23 boxing centers throughout the city. I brought the Polish Olympic Boxing Team to Chicago to box our Chicago team at the North Avenue Armory. The mayor attended the event and enjoyed it very much. Later I brought the

Irish Olympic Boxing Team to Chicago to box our Chicago team at Soldier Field. ABC Wide World of Sports televised the event. Keith Jackson interviewed the mayor at Soldier Field. He loved sports.

You had to be around him to know him, to appreciate him. He was very kind to me and my family. We had a great friendship. He was a great fisherman. He would call me at the park and tell me to "Get a boat! We are going fishing!" I am a very hyper individual and he knew I was not a fisherman. He knew that after a few minutes I would start walking around the boat, which would drive him crazy.

There's a great story about fishing that I have to tell you. William Lee, the president of the AFL-CIO union and also the vice president of the Chicago Park District was extremely close to the mayor. He had his boat available for us to use to fish on this day. Mr. Lee was also the vice president of the Chicago Park District and extremely close to the mayor. He had his boat available for us to use to fish on this day. Mr. Lee caught the first fish. I caught the second fish. And the mayor had not caught any. I started prancing around telling Mr. Lee that he was the heavyweight champion and that I was the lightweight champion. At this time, the guards were all waving at me to shut up. I really had no idea how serious he was about fishing. The mayor's first words in about an hour were, "If I don't catch a fish by the time we get back to Monroe Harbor, there will be a new superintendent of the Chicago Park District."

And low and behold, he did catch a fish. When we came in, we had the three fish. The co-host, Sam, was pretty well known. He took pictures of us. And I had the smallest fish. When we took the picture, if you see the picture back here, my fish looks like the largest fish here.

FWB: So that's the story of that photograph back there.

EK: Well, that's not the complete story. He had me come to the office the next day. When I went to the Mayor's the next day, the secretary Kay said, "Oh he enjoyed the fishing day so much, Eddie. He should do that more often." I said, "I hate fishing. I can't handle it." She said, "He was so excited that he caught the largest fish." Then I whipped out this picture of the fish. I was trying to be a smart aleck, you know. She looked at it and said,

"Could I hold this picture for a while?" I said, "Sure." I handed her the picture and I went in to see the Mayor.

Then I went back to the Park District and about an hour later I got a call. My secretary said, "It's the Mayor on the phone." I figured he forgot what he was going to talk to me about. He said, "You liar! What are you telling people that you caught the largest one?" And I'm on. I thought, "My God! What a mistake I made here!" It's because he was even competitive about fishing [FWB laughs]. So, I nearly got myself in trouble with that one. But the next time I went to the Mayor's office, his secretary threw the picture at me. She said, "Kelly, you get me in more trouble with your stories here." But anyway, that was a fish story that we had with him. He loved fishing.

The McFetridge Ice Complex was another story. When we built the ice complex over at California and Irving Park, he came in to the opening services and he said, "Well, you did it again. You built another facility in the Forty-seventh Ward." I told him, "There you go again. You're blaming me for everything." He said, "Well, isn't this in your ward?" I said, "No. This isn't in my ward." He said, "Well, where does your ward begin?" I said, "It's across the street [laughs]." But he had a big chuckle. He was a great person, as far as things of that nature.

I was with him the last day, when he passed away. The night before he passed away, he called my house. At nine o'clock, he was talking to my wife on the phone. Then I got on the phone. He said, "I want to see you tomorrow at nine o'clock." I said, "Well, I'm going to see you at the dedication out in Mann Park." He said, "You be here at nine o'clock!" And boom, down went the phone. I used to hate to go over to the Mayor's office because there was always ten to twelve people waiting to get in to see him. But I was there at nine o'clock. And sure as heck, when I walked in, there were about eight people sitting there. And his aide Tommy Donovan waived me in to see him. I figured, "Well, maybe he's not going to come to the dedication because it's in Vrdolyak's ward." And sometimes Vrdolyak would be in hot water.

I figured, "Well, maybe he's just going to tell me that he's not coming." But he did. And he started reminiscing about his kids. Very few people know this. Mrs. Daley knew it because I sat with her after the mayor's death, at her home. I was with him all day the day that he died. And he kept reminiscing about his boys. I kept saying to myself,

"Why did he ask me to come over to city hall at nine o'clock?" Anyway, after about fifteen to twenty minutes of sitting there with him I said, "You know, nobody's going to bother your boys if I ever am around." This was the day he passed away. Finally I said, "You're never going to get to the dedication unless you get all these people out of here. I've got to go back to the park. I've got these meetings." He said, "You wait out there. You drive with me." I said, "I can't."

So I left and I went out to Mann Park. I got there at eleven thirty. The phone rang and the supervisor said, "The Mayor's on the phone." I said, "He's going to cancel out." He was on his car phone. He said, "I'm just checking to see if you're there." So I walked out and met him. He pulled up in five minutes; he was calling from his car phone. He said, "Come on. I want to talk to you." So we went into the park office and sat in there alone. We were in there about twenty minutes. The Mayor and I were talking about things and personal things. Finally, the supervisor came in and said, "The dedication is ready to go."

Before we got into the dedication, I said to him, "Mr. Mayor, they're going to ask you to take a shot at the basket." I knew the Mayor hadn't touched a basketball in a long time. Anyway, they announced, "Ed Vrdolyak, the alderman, is going to shoot." He missed. Then they went into my basketball expertise and what a great player I was. I took a shot. I missed it. Then they asked the Mayor to take a shot. I really didn't think that he was going to. He took the ball outside the circle, threw it up, and it went right through the basket. Vrdolyak came over and made the greatest comment. He said, "He even beats us playing basketball." So that was the competitiveness about him.

After the dedication he said, "Come on out to the car. I want to talk to you." So I went out to the car and I sat with him. Mike Grainy was his driver. He asked him to roll the window up and he did. I figured, "Oh brother! What's going to happen here? He's going to lay something on me [laughs]." I didn't know what it was. I was confident that it wasn't that I was doing anything wrong at the parks. Then he started talking again about his family. Then all of a sudden, at one fifteen, I'll never forget it as long as I live, he said, "Come on. Take a ride with me. I've got a two o'clock appointment." He didn't say that he was going to the doctor. He just said two o'clock.

Now, a hundred times out of a hundred times, if the Mayor asked me to take a ride with him, I don't care where it would be, I would be there. But that was the day I was getting the money to renovate Soldier Field. And the Public Building Commission had a meeting over there. I said, "Mr. Mayor, I've got that meeting today to get that money for Soldier Field," because I was really earnest about renovating Soldier Field. I said, "I can't go." Now, if he would have told me about the doctor, forget about Soldier Field. I would have been in the car. But I left him in the car at one fifteen. Of course, when I got back to the Park District, that's when we got the call.

So, he had an unbelievable effect on my life. I idolized him. He had a way of getting people to work. He was the smartest man I've ever met.

I was looking for money for the park budget. I went over to see him and I was crying poor mouth to him. I wanted five hundred thousand dollars from the city. They had two million dollars allocated for the lakefront under Colonel Reilly's budget. I saw it in the budget. I figured, "You know, we're running programs in conjunction with the city. Why shouldn't we participate in that money?" I was crying the poor mouth to him about money. He said, "Leave your budget here with me." I left him at about four o'clock.

He called me back the next morning to City Hall. He said, "Here's the five hundred thousand that you can take out of your budget." He found the five hundred thousand in my budget. He was a genius on figures and numbers. I said, "I'm not going to do this again because getting money from you is like swimming in Lake Michigan." And he laughed.

You know, I went to wakes with him. He was amazing. He knew everybody by their first name. He was just unbelievable on names and people.

I'll tell you one funny story, too. This was second hand, but it was one that the guards told me. He was going down on the private elevator. They had that elevator they would hold for him when he had to leave. The two guards were standing behind him. And there was a five dollar bill on the elevator floor. The guards saw the five dollar bill. But of course, they're standing behind the Mayor. And as they got down to the first floor, the Mayor said "Well if you goofs aren't going to pick it up, I will!" So he picked the five dollar bill up and that was the end of it [EK and FWB laugh]! That's how alert he was.

And when there was business, it was business. There was no fooling around. But he lit up the room. And it was amazing being around when he walked in the room. I was in there when commissioners were there to see him. And he would tell me, "Stick around. Stay here." I'd want to leave. He'd say, "No. Stay here." And I would watch these commissioners come in. I'd sit back and they would sit at attention. It was not because he wanted them to, but because that's how in awe they were of him. He was just that type of an individual. But he was not a bit affected by any of this stuff, not at all. He was just an unbelievable person.

FWB: How was he with his family and with his boys?

EK: He was close and unbelievable. There was no one like his kids. That was most of our conversation. There's stuff that I can't go into. But that was part of his concern, his kids, especially the boys because the boys were in the political arena. Rich was a senator. John was just getting started, and Billy was very active. Mike was the senior who was so smart and so behind the scenes. Whenever you were with him, if he would be talking to his wife, he'd say "I'll see you at six." He was always home for supper, and church of course, everyday. He idolized his kids. They were great kids, and his girls were all the love of his life.

FWB: Tell me about some of the campaigns. You were very closely involved with a number of them.

EK: Actually, how I got stuck, well I shouldn't say stuck because I enjoyed every minute of it. You know, when he had the operation, the word was going around. And I was getting it in the area from Irish supporters. They said, "Well, maybe he should retire. He's had a tough time with his neck." And my problem was with my mouth. I'd go in there and start telling him those things. You know, "You've got to get out. You've got to do this and let people see you." And when I'd suggest something, he'd say, "You're so smart. You do it." So all of a sudden, here I'm running a campaign for him. The thought was to get him

out, make sure that people would see him, that he looked great, and that his mind was sharper than ever. And we did.

So I ran a rally for him at the Aragon Ballroom up in the northwest side of Chicago. I got five wards together from the lakefront. I organized the meeting and made sure that we were going to have a packed crowd for the Mayor. And I made every ward draw for seat assignment and floor assignments. The reason I wanted floor assignments was to make sure they had bodies in those seats. I invited a bunch of ball players. I had Abe Gibron and some of the Bulls there. Some of the White Sox players were there. Then, we had all of the candidates who were running there. And when he came in to the Aragon Ballroom, I think he thought it was just some kind of a ward rally.

Well, we had over six thousand. And it was like a mini convention. It was unbelievable. Prior to the rally, I told these committeemen to bring young people to the rally. I said, "Not job holders -- young people." "Why do you want young people?" I said, "Because they've never seen the Mayor in person." And my thought was, "When they see the Mayor in person, when he gets up before an audience -- talk about Knute Rockne. He's the Knute Rockne of politics." We brought him in with Mrs. Daley. And when he saw the audience, he was sort of taken aback. When he got up there, he gave a talk like only he could do. The crowd went nuts for him. He looked like fifty years of age.

As we were leaving the auditorium, I said "We've got one more stop." He said, "Where are you taking me now?" That's what I used to do to him. I said, "We've got to go over to Clarendon Park." It was only two blocks away. It was like eight thirty at night. So we went to Clarendon Park. And as we pulled into Clarendon Park, it was extremely dark, of course. I had put the notice out to the press that he was going to put the boxing gloves on with Tony Zale. The mayor had no knowledge of this. He was the former world middleweight champion who worked for me at the park. He was our chief boxing instructor -- the "man of steel." So we walked through the park. The ring was lit up like you're in Madison Square Garden. I said, "Come on. I want to get a picture with you and Tony."

So I got him up in the ring and he put the gloves on. He's standing there with Tony Zale and they're talking. And I leaned in between the two of them like a referee and said, "Tony, if you touch him, I'll kill you." So the two of them started laughing. The next

week *Time* magazine had a cover of Mayor Daley and Tony Zale with the boxing gloves. And the Mayor looked like fifty or so. That was what we wanted to portray.

When I had him at the Ice Capades at McFetridge's, we had him hitting a tennis ball. The *Sun-Times* had it on the front page, "Mayor Playing Tennis." It was to show that he was still viable, active, and strong. We ran a thirty thousand telephone survey. I had about twenty women working up at the LaSalle Hotel on the twelfth floor. These women would start at ten in the morning and work until nine at night. My wife was there every night, all day. And I alternated the women. It was secret poll that we were doing, because I didn't want people to know. But we were doing a poll on all fifty wards to see if every ward was really working on behalf of his election.

I found out on the polls that he was extremely strong in the black area. At that time, Ralph Metcalfe and him were having a dispute about the police. Of the fifty wards, in twenty-six wards there was no coverage. When we finished the poll, he called all twenty-six committeemen in. Little did they know about this poll. He started asking them about their captains, "You know, this captain in the Eighteenth Precinct." We had all of the captains' names from each ward. The committeemen said, "Oh yes, Mr. Mayor." Well, he hadn't been in there in two years. Then he would go to the next. Well, you can imagine when they left. They went back to their ward and they worked.

John Hoellen was the candidate against him. He was the alderman of my 47th Ward. I ran a young man, by the name of Gene Schulter, against Hoellen. We defeated Hoellen in the primary. I knocked him out in his own ward. I told the Mayor I was going to do it. He said, "You're not going to beat him." The Mayor didn't think that I was going to beat him because he felt that Hoellen was still too strong. Here, I got a young kid, which is what he was. And we did. I pretty much defeated him as a candidate for mayor, if he couldn't win in his own ward. Not that we ever thought that Hoellen had a chance of beating Richard J. Daley.

Our relationship was really friends. He knew my feelings towards him. He knew that I would do anything for him.

FWB: Did a lot of people go fishing with him and other social stuff?

EK: No. There were not too many.

FWB: You had a very close, incredible relationship.

EK: This is a true story. He said, "We're going fishing on Bill Lee's boat." I said, "Well okay." He said, "We're going to have lunch at the Monroe Yacht Club." So we went to the Monroe Yacht Club. Bill Lee and I really had a father and son relationship. Bill Lee had no children. But we were close. And I was thinking, "How am I going to get out of this?" He was going to have all of the park commissioners going on the boat. Mike Bilandic was going to go also.

We were at the Monroe Yacht Club having lunch and all of a sudden I got a phone call. It was a pre-arranged phone call. "Yes. Yes I can." The Mayor said, "What's up?" I said, "I've got to go to Milwaukee." I was on the board of the Milwaukee Bucks. "There's an important meeting up there." I laid the whole thing out and he's looking me right in the eye. And you know, it was pretty hard to fool him. But anyway, I just said "I've got to go." He said, "You can't go fishing?" I said, "No." They all got on the boat. They were pulling away. It was a beautiful day.

I was standing there. I said "If the boat goes down, I've got it all, the Park District, the city, and everything!" Well, they started waving their fists at me [EK and FWB laugh]. Bill Lee said, "Why do you say things like that?" The Mayor was laughing. [EK and FWB laugh]. But those are the kind of things you could say at leisure time. When it was business, you worked.

One of the nicest things that he said about me was at a function at the Ravenswood Manor dinner. He said that he always knew where he could find me when he needed me. Call the Park. I used to get to my office at seven in the morning. I'd be there until seven at night. But he loved the parks.

FWB: What was his relationship with the parks? You said he loved the parks. How did he show that?

EK: Prior to my becoming superintendent, I don't think that he attended many park functions like he did when I was there.

FWB: You were at Lincoln Park for a long time.

EK: Yes. I started out as a physical instructor for 11 years. So I was aware of events that were going on at the parks. There was the Daley Bicentennial Plaza, which was my suggestion. He loved being around the parks because he was around young people, too. He loved sports.

FWB: But he didn't do it before you really came in.

EK: Not really.

FWB: You succeeded McFetridge?

EK: No. McFetridge was the park president. Tom Berry was assistant superintendent. Red Wiener was general superintendent. When Red Wiener left, Berry became superintendent and I became assistant superintendent. When Tom left, I became superintendent. So that was pretty much my career. I started as a physical instructor, then a playground supervisor, then a park supervisor. I became an administrative aide. Then I became assistant superintendent. Then I became superintendent. So, I wasn't a ninety day wonder. I had nearly thirty eight years in the Park District.

But I never abused his time. I didn't call him just to impress people that we were friends. I was very protective of his time because I knew how everybody wanted to see him. Everybody wanted him at their political functions. Just to have the Mayor there was a success story. We had major events like Arbor Day.

Every Arbor Day, we'd have it on Michigan Avenue. He'd come there with Bill Lee. Bill Lee and him were extremely close. We always went to lunch, the three of us, on Arbor Day. One year Bill Lee would pay for it; then the Mayor would pay for it. We'd go to the Tavern Club. The Mayor was a member of the Tavern Club, as Bill Lee was.

When the check would come, I'd say "I'm not a member. I can't take this check." And they'd say, "You know, you're the cheapest guy, Kelly." Then we'd go to the Drake Hotel the next year, where Bill Lee was a member. And I'd do the same routine. I'd say, "I'm not a member of this." So they start beating up on me on how cheap I was. So one year, we went to The Drake. And I started my routine that I wasn't a member there. Bill Lee said, "You are now." And Bill Lee bought my membership. So I had to pay for the bill, because they told me how cheap I was [laughs]. But that was the fun time of being with him. It was a really fun time. But every time we had a major event, we invited him even if he didn't come. It was just to make sure he knew that he would be invited to it. But he loved it.

FWB: That's down in Humboldt Park there.

EK: Yes. He attended all of the major sports events like high school games. He enjoyed it. I think it got him away from the political atmosphere, because the parks were all recreation. He just loved fishing. He'd call my house at six o'clock in the morning. He used to call me early. And I'm an early riser, like he was. My wife answered the phone and I was shaving. I came out and said, "Who was that?" She said, "It was the Mayor." I said, "What did he want?" She said, "He didn't want to talk to you."

I was crushed. The Mayor called and he didn't want to talk to me. She said, "He asked me to go fishing. They're going fishing with Bill Lee and others." My wife loved to go fishing, I mean, really loved fishing. I said, "You mean he never asked for me?" She said, "I asked him if he wanted to talk to you. He said, 'No. He's nothing but a klutz [EK and FWB laugh].'" I got demoted.

What made it so obvious of how he was with the common person? We'd be coming out of City Hall. We'd be going somewhere and I'd be with him. The fellows of Streets and Sanitation were sweeping the gutters. He'd call, "Hey Sam! How are you doing, Sam?" Can you imagine this man going home? "The Mayor called me by my name."

When I wanted to move the band shell, it was in very bad shape. I kept telling him. I needed money to move the band shell. We were having lunch. After lunch, he was

driving me back to the park. I asked him to go down Randolph Street, and we did. I asked the driver to pull over. I said, "You know, this is where I want to move the band shell." He said, "Well, why here?" I said, "We've got parking across the street, the Monroe Parking garage. They can come right across the street into the band shell area and use the Michigan Avenue bus service. The seniors can get there real easy with the bus service, just walking distance." When I mentioned the seniors to him, that pretty much was the selling point. And I said, "I need the money." He said, "You got the money. Don't start asking for money."

We went back and I mentioned to the commissioner about the move. They said, "Well, we've got to check with the Mayor." I said, "The Mayor already said that it was okay." So I did find the money. I had a little over four hundred thousand. We moved the band shell. Just mentioning that the seniors would get there a lot easier, I think that was the selling point with him [laughs]. But he cared. He cared about people. I don't care who they were. He cared about everybody. That's why I idolized him.

FWB: There's a whole bunch of stories about the Mayor, and especially about his relationship with different types of people. What was his relationship with African Americans, with blacks, especially as it relates to the parks that you saw?

EK: Well, I think I answered that question. When he ran, the last time, the press were using Ralph Metcalf against him. When we did the telephone survey, we did thirty thousand cases. At the LaSalle Hotel, that's where we had our headquarters. We moved it from the Bismarck to the LaSalle. He'd stop in the mornings and at lunch. Before going home at night, he'd stop to show his appreciation for those women that were on the phones.

Our phone survey showed the African American vote was for him. In fact, the twenty-six wards where we found out there was no activity such as passing out material and contacting people, we hit those wards with the mailing. The other twenty-four we didn't go in with the mailing and we saved a lot of money. If I remember, we saved over three hundred thousand. Richie and Billy were handling all of the mailing.

The Mayor was smart enough not to waste money. In fact, he sent me over to tell Rich and Billy, "Don't mail it to these wards that worked so hard on my behalf. In fact, when he had his opening day for the campaign at the Bismarck, I had Mohammed Ali, Chet Walker from the Bulls, Norman Van Lier, and Bobby Love come over and wish him well. And Ali, at that time, was champion. He had a strong relationship with the blacks. It showed the public how the African American community supported the mayor.

FWB: You had a liberal wing in the Democratic Party, at that time.

EK: [Alderman] Leon DePres.

FWB: Yes. You had some serious criticism of the Mayor. There was also his relationship with Bill Singer and that, some on the north side, the more liberal wards. [We] had a chance to talk with Adlai Stevenson as well -- who also represented, in some ways, that wing of the party. What was his relationship with that wing and how do you think he kind of brought it together?

EK: Well, let me tell you, Bill Singer came around to being a supporter of his. Adlai Stevenson was a little distant to the Mayor. That[‘s what] the press was putting in the news media. Richard Daley went out to his farm at a fundraiser. That shows you what kind of a complete politician he was. I don't know how many politicians, if they were having a squabble with someone else, would do that. I don't know if I would do it. I'd say, "Heck, I'm not going out there." But he went out there. It showed you the class that he had as a leader. There was another thing about him. When Richard Nixon came into Chicago, he was the only politician that went out to greet him at O'Hare. A Republican president -- Mayor Daley went out there. No Republicans were out there. No Democrats were out there. Richard Daley was out there. And he said, "He is the President of the United States." In spite of all that trouble. That's the kind of man that he was.

FWB: So that was during Watergate?

EK: Yes.

FWB: That was 1973, 1974?

EK: Yes. You know, he had a personality. It's like being a coach. Politics is identical to coaching. If you're a committeeman, you've got precinct captains. Every one of them are different. You put people on the job. You want them to be doing a great job. When you find out that these people aren't doing a good job, you're embarrassed. The papers are attacking you because Joe Doe or whoever isn't doing a good job. You know, I haven't seen an office from the presidency on down that hasn't had that kind of trouble. I had it at the parks. I put people in there and I thought, "Well, great." It's funny about authority and if you want to use the word power, when some of these people get a job. Then all of a sudden, they have people working under them, kowtowing to them, kissing their ring fingers. All of a sudden, people start believing that they're the big one on the campus. Those are the ones that cause you trouble and embarrassment.

He had a tremendous heart about helping people, maybe too much sometimes, for the years he was constantly being elected. He had good relationships and good friendships with Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.

FWB: You talked some about his personality. And there's been a few times where, well, did you see him get angry? And if so, when?

EK: I saw him where he got angry. I was in his office one time when he called a very high elected official at two in the afternoon and he wasn't there. And his secretary couldn't find him. That's why he made the comment that I mentioned about me. He got so upset. It was a working day. "Where is he? Why can't I reach him?" He got angry. But the anger was over with after that. It wasn't an anger that, "I'm going to penalize him." But he let you know, right to your face. That was it. Yes, he would get angry. But it was not anger where he would lose his cool.

I'd been with him where, at slatemaking, things would happen on the spur of the moment. We had at slatemaking, a candidate who was an elected official that normally,

he was re-slating at the slatemaking. And when the committeeman didn't get up to give a speech on his behalf to re-slate him, I was sitting there. And the Mayor was sitting next to me. This was one of the first times. He said, "Go find out why he's not re-slating this person." So I went down and got to him. He said, "Oh, I'm going to re-slate someone else." And it was a woman. I went back to the Mayor and I said, "He said he's going to re-slate someone else. It's a woman." The Mayor said, "Okay. That's good. We need some women." He didn't get flexed or nothing. I mean, I would have gone crazy, but not him.

When he had his open house session at the Bismarck, when he was running, I had Ali come. I said, "Now Ali, can you get there at three o'clock?" He said, "Yes. I'll be there at three." Ali pulled up at three o'clock. He had his entourage and his limousine. And the Mayor was already in the Bismarck with people in the receiving line. Ali ran up the stairs at the Bismarck. I said, "What are you doing? Where are you going?" He said, "Never mind!" You know, he loves to do these things. He ran up the stairs, he went all the way to the back, and he came out behind the curtain where the Mayor was standing. I said, "You're going to get shot!" And the Mayor was standing there. Ali popped out from behind the curtain. The Mayor looked and said, "Hi Ali." He wasn't a bit phased [EK and FWB laugh]. I mean, anyone else would have jumped. But this was how he reacted. You had to have a head like he had to survive and go through the things he went through.

FWB: Did you see his reaction to when Tom Keane was indicted? Did you see his reaction? Did he talk to you about some of it?

EK: He was very somber. He never talked about other people's problems, never. He was very somber and very quiet. People knew, without talking, that you didn't want to bother him.

FWB: You didn't want to bother him with something like that.

EK: I know of instances where people that he helped got into trouble. He'd talk to me and mention it. It was always their family. He was worried about the family, the kids and the wife. That was the first thing that he would say.

FWB: So it was not anger, but rather disappointment.

EK: He was worried about the wife and the kids. That was him. You don't find too many politicians today that have that kind of concern. There are some, but not like him. It was always the family and the kids.

FWB: I heard that he was really focused on that. That was one of the things. He would really be disappointed if someone would not take care of his family.

EK: It was a priority. He didn't have too much respect for those people. But he didn't voice that publicly. He wasn't that type of person.

FWB: How did you see him involved with national politics? I know in 1972 ...

EK: I'd gone to Washington with him. We walked into the room. He had a number of people from the city with him on the plane. He walked into the room. You know, Mohammed Ali is the most recognized man in the world. Well, he was the most recognized man in the United States when he walked into the room. When he walked into the room, you saw the heads from Washington turn. And he didn't walk in there for that purpose. He just came in with all of us. The respect was unbelievable.

FWB: So you weren't with him in 1968? You had just met him, right?

EK: I was committeeman. I became committeeman in 1968. But my closeness to him came later.

FWB: It was after that point. So, were you there in 1972 in the convention?

EK: I didn't go to the convention. I gave my seat up. I think it was to Neil Hartigan.

I had seats every year there. But I never went. To me, I was always busy at the Park. I was always worried about the Park.

FWB: You were focused on the Park.

EK: I didn't want to be down there. I was a delegate every time. But I never did. One year I gave it to Dick Elrod. Another year I gave it to Neil Hartigan. I forget who else.

FWB: Ok. So you weren't in that kind of party?

EK: No. I wasn't.

FWB: Just to get an idea, when the Mayor died, how was the succession done in the Democratic Party in the Mayor's office? You were involved in some ways with that as well.

EK: Well, Mike Bilandic succeeded him. He was elected from the city council. Mike Bilandic came in and succeeded him. He was a wonderful person. Mike and I became friends when he was mayor. And after he left, we became even closer. He was a tremendous admirer of the Mayor. There was no question about it. You know, you asked me a question about the Mayor and these rivals. When Dan Walker was running for governor, he came to me at the Park District. He wanted me to get him to the committeemen because they weren't taking him to their ward meetings, their rallies, and functions.

The first thing I did was call the Mayor and told him that Walker was in to see me. I told him what he wanted me to do. He wanted me to raise money for him and stuff like that. The reason that Walker came to me was because one of his key guys knew me when he was a kid. So that's how he came in to see me. And I was chairing the north side meetings. I was chairman of the north side wards. I used to conduct meetings with the Mayor's approval. I went to him when we started this and asked him if it was all right to

do this. I told him the reasons why I wanted to do this. And he was one hundred per cent behind it. So I used to conduct meetings for all of the north side wards.

Maybe that's why Walker probably figured, "Well, maybe he can get me into the north side wards." So I did call the Mayor and the Mayor told me, "Eddie, you help him, but be a little careful of him." So I did. I called Vrdolyak, Burke, and a bunch of the committeemen. And I got Walker in their wards.

Of course, he got elected. Neil Hartigan was the lieutenant governor at the time. We were getting our tax increase at the Park and Walker assured me that he was going to sign it and everything else. All of a sudden, I got a call saying that he wasn't going to sign it, after he had told me he would. I was with him a day before. I was very upset about that because I remember what the Mayor had told me. We were taking over Warren Park from the state. They wanted to get rid of Warren Park.

FWB: That was a state park.

EK: Yes. They were getting a lot of pressure because it was lying idle. There was nothing being done there. There were trying to lay it off on the Parks. Of course, we didn't have the money to do the development. Anyway, I had agreed prior to this commitment that he made that we would take Warren Park under the condition that he would give us the money to help develop it and we'd do the rest. Well, when this guy called me and told me that he wasn't going to sign the bill, I said "Then you'd better look at the fine print, because you've got Warren Park back." I was the one that told our lawyer, Dick Troy, who is deceased now, "I remember what Mayor Daley told me, to be careful with this guy. I want you to put a clause in there that if they don't come up with the money within a year," which was quite a bit, "that we can return the park back to them." Well, when I told them that they were going to get it back, about ten minutes later I got a call saying, "He got your bill mixed up with another bill. He signed the bill."

There again, just listening to Mayor Daley saved us a lot of problems. With the facility, we would have been in the same position they were in, in getting the pressure from the people. Of course, thank God, later on we developed Warren Park and it's a beautiful facility up there for the area. But things I learned just being around him.

FWB: He warned you about it.

EK: He warned me.

FWB: He warned you about Walker.

EK: Oh definitely. He definitely told me to watch out.

FWB: That was one of the things, when you were close to the Mayor, from 1972 to 1976. That's when Walker was governor. Well, as we started talking at the beginning, Paul Simon has just passed away.

EK: I talked to Paul Saturday.

FWB: Yes. That's what you had said. And in the 1972 campaign, he was Daley's candidate in the Democratic primary to running for governor. Walker unseated him, defeated him in the primary, and then went on to win the election. And much of Walker's campaign was run against Mayor Daley. That's why I was somewhat surprised to see you with Walker there, in the picture.

EK: Well, Walker came to my ward. That was at my ward.

FWB: Ok. That's at the ward, that photograph.

EK: Yes. That photograph was at my ward, with Neil Hartigan. Now, Neil Hartigan is very close to me.

FWB: And also to the Mayor.

EK: Sure. And Neil was running for lieutenant governor, too. So I was with Neil Hartigan. Of course, Walker was running for governor. So I had him at the ward. That's at my Forty-seventh Ward. I had two hundred people packed in there for him. I had pictures taken. I have a lot of pictures of that event. [inaudible] I went out and I worked hard for him like all of us did. But I remember the Mayor telling. And when I put that agreement together, Dick Troy said, "What made you do that?" I said, "Richard J. Daley. That's what made me." Just being around him and watching him when he would be with people, people would come in and talk to him, and how he would listen. He would listen to different people. And I'm certain that was a lot of ways he was able to come up and make a decision, people that he really felt were telling him the truth.

FWB: How did he know that about Walker?

EK: I don't know. But he had a sixth sense about people. He told me about certain people. I learned a lot just being around him at slatemaking. Most press people don't realize it. But slatemaking isn't just going up there and announcing the candidates. You're doing political work prior to slatemaking. You're doing it while you're in slatemaking. You're talking to committeemen about supporting candidates that you want or whoever the Mayor feels is a strong candidate. It's like going to college. And you couldn't have a better teacher than him of anyone. You learned so much being around him like union negotiations, he and Bill Lee.

I was lucky to be around Bill Lee. I was the superintendent for fifteen and a half years. I never had a strike, I never had a deficit, and I never had a layoff, because of those two gentlemen. That's just what I learned being around them, how to treat people and how to get along with people. If you couldn't agree, there was a medium. There had to be a happy medium somewhere.

FWB: How was he in the slatemaking?

EK: Oh, he was cool.

FWB: Give me some examples.

EK: In slatemaking?

FWB: Yes.

EK: Remember, people were so in awe of him. I'm talking about the political people. You know, when you walked in the room, you saw the Mayor. Everybody was in awe of him. And when he ran the meetings, they were attentive.

FWB: You're pointing for the camera. Not like ... ?

EK: Richard J. Daley.

FWB: Ok. You learned how to do the meeting.

EK: Oh yes, but not like Richard J. Daley. There was only one. I've never met anyone like him in my life. I've had a very close relationship with Jimmy Carter, and some well known people like all of the people in politics, such as Dan Rostenkowski. And even they were in awe of him. I was with him one night for dinner with President Ford. I could see the way Ford treated him. He was special, very special.

FWB: What about some of the folk around the Mayor? This project is not just limited to Mayor Daley, but we also want to use this as a way to understand Chicago politics from the inside, from Daley on through Harold Washington, and even into Richard M. Daley, the current mayor. Could you explain, for example, his relationship to Jane Byrne, and then to Bilandic?

EK: Well Jane Byrne of course, as you're probably aware of, was very much involved with the Kennedy Campaign. I'm sure that's how she came about, as far getting involved over at City Hall and the Mayor making her consumer supervisor. And the Mayor knew

that the women were coming into their own which, at that time, they weren't. So he was ahead of everyone on that one, too. He put her in there and he pretty well started to groom her and made her start a women's' organization, with her chairing it. She became the chairperson of the woman's organization. So he knew it was time.

I was with him and I was the last person with him the day that he died. I'm certain that he was tired. I'm sure that he was tired of the constant pressure. I don't know how anyone could stand it as long as he did, because he cared. If he didn't care, I don't think the pressure would be that tough on a person. He knew the parks. He encouraged me to start promoting women over, which I did. I made the first park woman supervisor and the first area supervisor. I started moving women over there, because he kept encouraging me. A lot of that was his tutoring. I wasn't the brains behind everything. We'd sit and have lunch. And I'd listen to him. If I disagreed with him, I would do so.

FWB: Did you have some big disagreements, or kind of small?

EK: Oh no. Well, I'd argue with him. But not too many people would argue with him. I'd argue with him, but never in public, because I'd never show any disrespect to him. But I'd argue with him once in a while. In fact, Bill Lee used to try and shut me up. The three of us would be having lunch. Then they'd start playing good guy -- bad guy, "Oh, Eddie didn't do that." Or, "I can't believe Eddie would do that." I'd say, "Oh, here we go, good guy -- bad guy again." Then I got into a discussion with him one day. I was never disrespectful, never. I would never show any disrespect to him. And Bill Lee was kicking me under the table. I think he thought that I was getting a little too wild. I said, "Will you quit kicking me under the table?" And the Mayor bust out laughing. Then of course, when we went back to the park, Bill Lee went with me. He said, "Why do you do things like that?"

FWB: So he had a strong sense of humor?

EK: Oh gosh yes, it was all the time. But like I said, there were times that you were over in that office and it wasn't show time. You weren't there cracking jokes. You were there

on business. But if he was out on lunch or if he was away from it, he was a great kidder. He loved to kid. He loved to tease.

FWB: You don't see that side too much.

EK: Oh, he did [laughs]. Well, he'd call my wife and say, "I don't want to talk to him. He's nothing but a klutz [laughs]."

FWB: Well, tell me a little more about that transition after the Mayor died. A number of people had been saying to him, "You know, maybe you shouldn't run this term because of your health."

EK: Well Fred, that's what I went and told him. I didn't tell him he shouldn't run. I told him, "You've got to get out now." See, after the operation, he was told that the doctor wanted him out of there at two o'clock. And I'll never forget it. One day he called me. I never hung around city hall. If I got a call from him to come over, I would come over. He called me one day and he wanted me to come over. I got there at about two o'clock, two thirty. And Ritchie and Billy were sitting there. There were no people outside waiting to get in to see him. They were sitting there. I knew the schedule of when he was supposed to be out of there.

Anyway, I walked into the office and I sat with him. And he started talking about different things with me. I'm figuring, "Why did he call me to come over here? This could have been done on the telephone." So I'm sitting with him there for about twenty minutes. I said, "You know, Richie and Billy are sitting out there. You've got to go home." See, I would speak up like that. Not too many political guys would try to get personal about him. But I would. I said, "You know, you've got to go home."

FWB: Just to clarify, the doctor said he had to be out of there by two?

EK: Well, the doctor suggested that he leave at two in the afternoon.

FWB: You mean two in the afternoon each day?

EK: And be home, yes.

FWB: He should take it a little easier just for his health.

EK: Right. He finally called Rich and Billy in and we sat there. Finally I said, "Let's go." So we all got up and as we were walking out, the secretary went like this [he gives a hand salute]. But I would say, "Let's go." Not too many people would do that. But I would. But I knew that he wouldn't resent it. I wasn't trying to be his father, his coach, his son, or anybody else. I just cared about him, you know. I really cared about him.

FWB: Did he talk about what would happen after he passed away, about the Mayor's office? Did he ever choose a successor or that?

EK: He was concerned about his kids.

FWB: It was just about his kids.

EK: I know that personally. We talked about that. He was concerned about his children. Who he was grooming, I don't know. We never talked about who he was grooming and who would make a fine Mayor or anything like that. I never would even raise that question because it would look like "Well, what about me?" I never had the thought, either.

EK and FWB: It was always his family.

EK: I personally know that because we talked about it.

FWB: Yes. You would usually talk about it. Could you pause just a second? I have to switch the tape. How much time do you have?

EK: I've got to be out of here in about fifteen minutes.

[End of tape one]

[EK and FWB are looking at old photographs]

FWB: Oh, that's the rally that you were talking about.

EK: Yes. That was at the Aragon Ballroom. I've got pictures of crowds there. I've got so many.

FWB: What are you thinking of doing with those eventually? Do you have a plan to ...?

EK: Well, I made cufflinks.

FWB: You may duplicate them or copy them in some ways?

EK: I made cufflinks for the Mayor and I also made these.

FWB: Oh, those are key chains.

EK: I made cufflinks and I gold-plated them. I gave Richie a gold plated one with his picture on it. I think I made about two to three hundred of these. This was for the election when he was running. They were cuff links. He took quite a few from me. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Well, you're not going to use all of these." With the cuff links, I've got them at home. I forgot to bring them

[EK points to the picture on the wall behind him]. With the fishing here, he's got my hat, my jacket, my brand new gym shoes, and my sweat socks. And after we fished that day, he took everything home, including my fish.

FWB: Oh, he took the fish home [laughs]?

EK: He took everything. And with Mrs. Daley, I know the story because she told me. She said, "Dick came in with your hat, your jacket, your shoes, and your fish. Did Ed catch any fish?" He said, "Yes. He caught this one." She said "Well, didn't you let him take it home?" He said, "He doesn't like fishing!" I said, "You're like the invader. You took my hat, my jacket, my shoes, my sweat socks, and my fish [EK and FWB laugh]!" That's a true story! She was bawling him out.

FWB: You mean for taking the fish.

EK: He said, "He doesn't like fish." But that's the way he was [EK and FWB laugh].

FWB: Yes. That's the Mayor.

EK: [Pointing to the picture] He took my hat, my jacket, my gym shoes, everything. He wore a nine gym shoe. He called me and said, "We're going fishing." And he was giving a speech over at the Conrad Hilton Hotel. So I called Mrs. Daley at her house trying to get some shoes for him, because he couldn't be on the boat with them. And she wasn't at home. So I had someone go to my house. I called my wife. I said, "Get the gym shoes. Get the equipment." So when he came over to the boat, he took his suit coat off. And that's how he got into that attire.

FWB: He's in a tie there, too.

EK: Did I tell you the story about the Coors Beer [pointing to a picture]?

FWB: You told me the story but not on tape.

EK: This is true.

FWB: Tel me the story on tape.

EK: I had an anniversary party for William Lee and his wife Pam over at the Empire Room. Of course, the Mayor and Mrs. Daley came. The union leaders came. That's the picture, of course, there. Anyway, Bill Lee and the Mayor liked Coors Beer. Of course, Coors Beer wasn't in the city and it was a non-union beer. So Bill Lee, who was the president of the A.F.C.L. said, "Now Eddie, get the Coors Beer. But make sure it's in some kind of an ice container [laughs]." So I had it all set up and I put the beer in an ice container. So when they served the ice container with the beer, Bill Lee and the Mayor took the Coors Beer out. And the other union guys were saying, "Hey Bill, give us one of those Coors Beer." He said, "Never mind. This is just for the Mayor and me!" So that was what happened with the Coors Beer [laughs]! That's the way they were, like two little kids, fighting over Coors Beer [laughs]. But he and the Mayor liked Coors Beer.

FWB: I'm going to show that picture [swinging the camera]. There we go. I can see it [bringing the camera in for a close-up shot].

EK: [Pointing to the picture] Yes. Here's the Mayor and Mrs. Daley, my wife Marilyn, Bill Lee, Pam Lee, and myself. There's Tommy Fall, the union guy. So these are all of them. We had a great time. Rich Little was the performer that night. I had someone reach Rich Little, who was a friend of his and ask him, "Please don't make the Mayor the brunt of your show." And Rich Little said, "I could never do that to Mayor Daley." He was great. And that night it was prom night for high school kids. Every one of the kids came over to the table and they were hugging the Mayor. We had a great time. It was a lot of fun. He enjoyed it so much.

FWB: Do you know when that was? Do you remember?

EK: [Looking at the picture and reading the date] It was December 14, 1973, at the Empire Room.

FWB: You've got most of these all captioned on the back?

EK: Yes.

FWB: That's one of the concerns. We've got a lot of pictures from people donating them or getting copies. A lot of them don't have captions. So we don't know when they are.

EK: Well, Paul Greene came to me about a year ago. And they did an interview with me at my ward, over on Lincoln Avenue. I gave them a number of pictures. But I didn't give them all of the pictures I had at home. They did give them back. But I've got some great pictures of him that are personal pictures. You know, it's something I'll keep forever. My wife, of course, was a great admirer of his, too.

FWB: And Mrs. Daley, they got along well?

EK: Oh Mrs. Daley, yes. How could you not get along with Mrs. Daley? Oh yes, she was very special.

FWB: Yes. That's too bad.

EK: I miss him. I really do. I think about him all of the time.

FWB: What do you think about the current Mayor?

EK: They're all together different.

FWB: How so?

EK: With the current Mayor, I think the reason why he's different is because things are changed here, in the city and all over the country. And he's doing pretty well [laughs].

He's going to get re-elected. He's done a great job. How could you not compliment him? Some of the old timers, and I'm an old timer now, they'll say, "I wonder why he did this?" And then later on you'd find out why he did it.

FWB: You see a lot of his father in him.

EK: Oh yes. I'm seeing him more now.

FWB: How so?

EK: Well, when he's talking now, he's more like Richard J. Daley. I see it so much now when he's speaking; it's Richard J.

FWB: How different do you see them as? They're from different times, yes. But how different in style are they?

EK: Rich has got kind of a personality of the dad. You know, if you're with him and you're cracking and making comments, he starts laughing. He's just like his dad. He's got a hearty laugh like his dad. His dad did, too.

FWB: He had a good sense of humor?

EK: Oh yes. He's that type. If you're with him and you make some kind of smart crack or something, he'll chuckle and he'll laugh like his dad. He's got pretty much the same kind of a laugh. Yes he has.

FWB: Have you seen different relations with the parks? Or aren't you as closely involved with the parks anymore?

EK: Who me?

FWB: Yes.

EK: No. I left the parks over twenty years ago. Since I left, I've never given any kind of public relations about the parks or anything. I've felt that there are things I've disagreed with in what's been going on there. But who am I to say? I figured that it would look like sour grapes if you got on the phone and started criticizing the parks. With the Mayor and the people at the parks, it's their responsibility. It's past tense as far as I'm concerned. I loved the parks. I couldn't get up fast enough in the morning to go to work. I lived in the parks...it was all of my life. As a kid, I lived in a park called Seward Park in Cabrini Green. I lived across the street from the park. I was a park gym rat. And little did I ever believe that I would become the superintendent of the parks.

FWB: You left during Washington's administration.

EK: I had three years left on my contract when I left. I could have stayed on but I knew what was going to happen. And it did happen.

FWB: What do you mean? I'm not sure.

EK: Well, I thought that there was going to be a decline.

FWB: You mean in the parks?

EK: Yes.

*****END OF INTERVIEW*****