

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program

COLMAN MCCARTHY

*Interviewed by: Daniel F. Whitman
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Dan Whitman interviewing Colman McCarthy. We are on the American University campus and it's February 23, 2015. Now, Colman McCarthy, for those who will be reading this transcript, was instrumental in the creation and sustaining of the Peace Corps at the time of its creation and has also been a columnist for The Washington Post and now teaches Peace Studies in various places. Colman in my opinion you are the most interesting person on this campus. May I know what got you started and as far back as you are willing to go? May I know where you are from and the sorts of influences or the sorts of activities that you had as a child? Can we go back that far?

MCCARTHY: Oh sure, I was the fourth child of my parents and I grew up in a little town on Old Brookville, Long Island. My father was an immigration lawyer and my mother was a homemaker. My father took care of people coming through Ellis Island in the late 1940s. Our home was routinely filled with immigrants who were unable to get settled so my father would take them in and he had several clients on the north shore of Long Island and that is where J.P. Morgan had his big estate and E.F. Hutton had an estate in that area. My dad knew the lawyers for Hutton and J.P. Morgan. As a result he knew where the jobs were for the chauffeurs and the gardeners and the caretakers of the big estates. He found jobs for many of the people coming over from Poland, or Greece, or Italy, or Ireland, and so I had an education about people coming from harder lives and hard times.

Q: This goes way beyond what a lawyer would normally do.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah.

Q: He took them in and found jobs in many cases in that area in northern western Long Island.

MCCARTHY: It's called the Gold Coast and Glenn Cove, Sands Points...

Q: East Marion.

MCCARTHY: ...Great Neck and Nassau County which is about 40 minutes East of Manhattan.

Q: Of the city, yes.

MCCARTHY: So it was being settled by the upper class, the tycoons so that was an education learning real early that the world was a bigger place than my little comfortable community.

Q: So he stretched way out economically...

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: ...to the barons?

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: And way down economically to those who needed work immediately in order to survive.

MCCARTHY: Sure, sure. It always struck me that real peacemaking is finding jobs for people, which is something Gandhi never did. Martin Luther King never gave a job to anybody so when you do that I admire people who provide incomes for citizens.

Q: I'm already thinking if we were to search for a title for this conversation it might be that; Real Peacemaking is Getting Jobs for People."

MCCARTHY: Well that's one of the ways you can do it but there's many ways to be a peacemaker. Many, many ways.

Q: So as a child you saw this happening in your house. Did you see this as something unusual? Did it seem normal because it was happening in your house?

MCCARTHY: Well you can't measure because you don't know what another family is going through. My dad died when I was sixteen so I had a very severe grief reaction. He was the first person I knew who died and it was a sudden coronary. I had to leave school and I had a brother who was then in the military at Ft. Benning, Georgia, so he could get out six months early if he had a dependent living on the military base with him. So my mom shipped me down to Ft. Benning, Georgia, and I went to a high school there.

Q: To get out of the military do you mean by having a dependent?

MCCARTHY: My brother could get out six months early, he was a lawyer in the judge advocate's course so he knew all the little angles; he was an Army lawyer. So I went there and went to Baker High School and one of my schoolmates about two or three years behind me was Newt Gingrich.

Q: Oh my gosh.

MCCARTHY: But it was a wonderful year going south and that was in 1954 the year of Brown v. Board of Education.

Q: Right.

MCCARTHY: There I was in an all white high school suddenly they had to change their policies and accept African Americans and they didn't want to do it. So I saw that up real close and the very same year I was at that school the Brown decision came down from the court.

Q: First of all you left school because of the emotional state you were in?

MCCARTHY: Yeah, I went to a high school on Long Island that was in April and I just couldn't finish the year. So they said, "That's fine, don't worry about it," I just had a very severe grief reaction.

Q: Gee whiz.

MCCARTHY: So my mom thought maybe a change of atmosphere will help you out; it did and it worked out fine; so I went south.

Q: It was brilliant on the part of your mother.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, sure...

Q: This wouldn't happen nowadays, the mother would keep you.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, yeah, so it worked out well and I spent a year in Georgia and saw civil rights really up close.

Q: You mentioned Newt Gingrich; did you meet him?

MCCARTHY: I had no idea who he was but I do know he went to Baker High around about the time I was there.

Q: So 1954 at what point were you in your own intellectual evolution?

MCCARTHY: Well I, like all high school students, just take what comes your way and try to figure it out. I loved golf, I was a golfer when I was a boy and we had a very large lawn and my dad built a four-hole golf course for me. I had my own pro when I was eight years old running my own golf club; so I've played golf ever since. I turned pro in college and I played a PGA tournament and won six amateur tournaments.

Q: You were a pro?

MCCARTHY: I turned pro in college to help pay my way through school. I gave lessons and then...

Q: Well this is totally fascinating. You mentioned Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, you were in high school and you saw things changing. You saw that African Americans were now going into schools that did not want them. What went through your mind?

MCCARTHY: Well it was eye opening and it would work out well because after I graduated from high school I went to a college in Mobile, Alabama, a little Jesuit school, Spring Hill College, which is not very well known except it is the second oldest Jesuit school after Georgetown and, as a footnote in history, from the Birmingham jail Martin Luther King talked about integration in the south. The only school he mentions was Spring Hill College which integrated way before any other school in the south long before Brown. So I went to that school and again saw it up close. The Ku Klux Klan was very strong in Mobile, Alabama, it still is; that's a big Klan city. They would drive through our campus in their white robes, burn their cross out in front of the college and there you saw it up close again.

Q: Did you see, by any chance, today's Post article about Rosa Parks and her description of how we all remember the picture of her dressed very nicely on the bus.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Today's Post mentions her rage we now know was tremendous. She used to sit with her father with his shotgun and her father said, "The first one who comes in gets killed."

MCCARTHY: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And she was entirely in favor of that.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Very understandable but this is a side of Rosa Parks I don't know if that is relevant but it's the same period I think.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah indeed because she was not the first choice of the Civil Rights Movement to sit in the bus. She was the second or third choice because the first choice was somebody, a younger woman, and then they found out she had a police record of some type or she was on welfare, there were some negatives about the first couple of people they wanted to do it. Then they found Rosa who was a seamstress, I think in the 60s or whatever her age was, but she would be a lot safer.

Q: Yeah, this is fascinating. The picture, the photo of her dressed so nicely. This morning I actually had this thought the picture was clearly arranged by somebody; it wasn't spontaneous.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, it wasn't spontaneous, it was all planned out ahead of time so she was a safe pick. The other one and there were one or two other women they were negatives.

Q: Anything else that you can tell us about that incident? We are out of chronology here but that's fine.

MCCARTHY: Well King himself never set out to be a civil rights leader. When he graduated from Boston University Theological he applied to three jobs. One was in Atlanta where his Republican father was a minister, he applied to a big mega-church in Nashville and the third was in Montgomery at a smaller church. He accepted the offer from Montgomery and never planned on getting in...he wanted to be a middle class pastor like his father. Then suddenly that's when things happened and he was thrown in the middle of it.

Q: I know that you are very familiar with the history and you've studied it and you've taught it but was there any personal connection? He was in Montgomery, Alabama, and is that where your Jesuit school was?

MCCARTHY: No, I was in Mobile but I was there during the years when the school was being integrated and Blacks would come to Spring Hill College and white families would pull their children out of that school; they didn't want them going with the Black students. But King singled out that school and if you read that letter from Birmingham jail right toward the end he mentions Spring Hill College.

Q: Yeah, one of the great documents of American history.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah and years later I graduated from college in 1960 and then I felt as though I didn't take full advantage of my college years; I was on a golf scholarship.

Q: No one takes advantage but you did pretty well.

MCCARTHY: You're right, you're right. I read more greens than I read books. I was out reading the greens and not reading the books.

Q: Greens are a part of nature and nature is a pretty important thing.

MCCARTHY: Yes, yes. So then I was driving back home from Mobile up to New York and I knew about a monastery in Georgia so I said, "Well let me go in there for a week and I'll calm down and get my head together." So I went for a week and I ended up staying for five years in a Trappist Monastery. I don't really know much about the Trappists but they are very strict and Thomas Merton...

Q: Wow, that's Kentucky, right?

MCCARTHY: Yes that's right this was the daughter house. Merton's monastery was so overflowing that people were brought in by Merton's books but they had to have what they called a daughter house...

Q: A daughter house.

MCCARTHY: ...so the fathers and brothers' came down from Kentucky and founded a new monastery in Conyers, Georgia. So I went there and I was a lay brother. I was never studying to be a priest at all but it was a great five years. It was very disciplined, you were cloistered, you never went anywhere; you could only write letters four times a year. The only time you could leave is if you wanted to give blood to the Red Cross. They'd come to a little town about five miles down the highway to a little rural town. So I loved getting out and I held the Georgia Red Cross record for blood donations.

Q: It got you out.

MCCARTHY: Four pints a year.

Q: Pardon the pun but it got you circulating.

MCCARTHY: It got me circulating.

Q: Who could read Thomas Merton and not want to be a Trappist? I can't imagine.

MCCARTHY: It was great and it was great in 1948 best seller, *The Seven Story Mountain*.

Q: Yes, yes.

MCCARTHY: So I was there for five years and the Abbot knew that I couldn't resist giving that blood. He said, "I think the world is calling you."

Q: Even in the extremely peaceful setting you were a trouble maker going well back.

MCCARTHY: Well it was hard then, they had a very strict cloister rule and the first four years I was there I worked on the dairy crew. We had about two hundred Jersey cows and I milked them twice a day and then shoveled their manure for the rest of this time. It was a wonderful discipline and I came to love it.

Q: What kept you for five years?

MCCARTHY: After you are there for two years then you take what they call simple vows for three years. Then after simple vows then you take final vows and then it's like being engaged. Then I thought it was very difficult as you never saw the results of your work except feeding the cows but most people need to get stimulation seeing the results of their work. But every day was the same, you go to mass every day, meals are the same time

every day, I mean it was so regularized some people like that but that was the hard part. The good part was the quiet, the contemplation, there was no television, no newspapers and...

Q: Where is the closest Trappist Monastery I think I want to go tomorrow.

MCCARTHY: Seventy miles out on Route 7, Berryville, VA. It's a very small, very contemporary community and every guest house...you can Google their name; I think it's Holy Cross Monastery.

Q: Fantastic.

MCCARTHY: Are you from a Catholic background?

Q: No.

MCCARTHY: It doesn't matter.

Q: Oh I know. I've stayed in a Trappist place in Western Massachusetts where I've stayed briefly.

MCCARTHY: Yes, that's right between Worcester and Boston.

Q: No, I think it's West of there but I forget. A total parenthesis but a dear friend and you'll see in the book which is dedicated to Bart Rouseve who was almost a Franciscan.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: And was driving to that monastery from his home in New York and never made it; he used to fall asleep at the wheel.

MCCARTHY: A car crash, oh my heavens, how awful.

Q: He ran off the road on the Taconic and at the funeral everybody was saying, "Well Bart took the shortcut."

MCCARTHY: Is that right?

Q: He could have gone to the monastery but we all knew he was going to heaven.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, nice, wow.

Q: Why does society need monks?

MCCARTHY: Well it was interesting, Dan, to keep the civil rights issue going. This was also a big time in the South and there were churches being burned all throughout Georgia

so the monastery had a wonderful stained glass industry and that was one of the ways we were self supporting making stained glass for churches. When they rebuilt the churches, the monastery would put in the stained glasses, even though we aren't supposed to have a mission, but the Abbot was very liberal about it and thought it was a good thing to do.

Q: That's a beautiful gesture.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Is it possible to articulate the meaning that this had for the towns that benefitted from these stained glasses?

MCCARTHY: Well remember the book Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin?

Q: Yes.

MCCARTHY: He came to the monastery and that's in the book and he went to the retreat house for a couple days and that's part of that book Black Like Me. He knew the monks were doing this stained glass window operation. People often compare the Trappist kind of like they are the battery in the engines. You don't see the power coming out of the battery but it's there.

Q: Without it there is nothing.

MCCARTHY: Yeah it just looks like it doesn't move but it supplies the energy. So that's the metaphor they often use.

Q: Personally to me this sounds so appealing I can't imagine why a person would ever leave; technically to give blood from time to time.

MCCARTHY: Right, yeah. He had no family, the rest are negatives.

Q: Very quiet can be oppressive maybe. They have the same pattern day after day, after day, after day.

MCCARTHY: There is enormous faith that this means that you contribute something to the world.

Q: Only with faith can you maintain that way of life.

MCCARTHY: Oh it's hard to do like if you are a priest you have a parish or if you are a Jesuit teaching at a school; you know they get that stimulation.

Q: Can you describe what it was you had faith in?

MCCARTHY: Well you thought that you were part of the battery that you were charging up the world by being there.

Q: You haven't mentioned the Deity. Is that important and should we talk about that?

MCCARTHY: Well I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church and the monastery was Roman Catholic so it was a natural progression there.

Q: Any comments on any individual the way they are raised and the conclusions they make in the life of their faith? It isn't inherited very often; any comments about that?

MCCARTHY: Well I must say, Dan, I wouldn't call myself a traditional Catholic. I am very disillusioned by the church really. It's not a peace church, the Catholic Church believes in the just war, they do not stick up for animal rights issues, it's not a pacifist church the way Mennonites are pacifists, the Quakers are pacifists, the Church of the Brethren are pacifists and Catholics can go in the military and we have Catholic chaplains in the military. So you could argue they supplement government policies and that shouldn't be.

Q: I don't know if you'd seen yesterday the story of the Vatican bank...

MCCARTHY: Yes, another example.

Q: I mean to the credit of the current Pope trying to clean itself up; Francis, anyway that's another topic.

MCCARTHY: I don't attend and haven't been to a mass for thirty or forty years.

Q: That must be personally very disappointing to you.

MCCARTHY: Well you know I really have no need for it. I don't say that out of arrogance but I don't approve of the policy. It's a membership organization and it has rules and I don't agree with the rules so okay don't stay in the organization. Now some people say stay and work from within. Okay well if you feel a call to do that proceed and do so but if it's a membership organization you got to obey its rules.

Q: Sure. I don't mean for this to sound like a good contradiction...

MCCARTHY: Then don't.

Q: ...but you said that your faith or a person can only be in a Trappist Monastery driven by faith because of the tedium of the daily rhythm but that faith broke down I guess after that with regard to the Roman Catholic Church?

MCCARTHY: I don't know whether I'm an atheist or an agnostic or what am I, I don't pay attention to it, it just doesn't matter what label you put on your life.

Q: Let me rephrase the question. Faith as taught to you by the Church kept you in the monastery but it did not live up to your expectations in regard to the church itself? It seems like separate things.

MCCARTHY: Well I was just too young to question it Dan. It takes time to question things and it's hard to do. In my classes I always tell my students at the first of every semester, "In this class please don't ask any questions they are forbidden. Instead do something much more difficult, much more courageous, question the answers. The answers that anybody gives you says violence is the answer let's start the question then. That takes courage to break away to do that.

Q: When and how did you come upon this construct, this unusual construct, don't ask questions but question the answers; when did that occur to you?

MCCARTHY: Well when I came to be a journalist that's what we do we ask questions and then we question those answers. When you interview politicians or anybody there's one or two people who control the interview, the interviewer or the interviewee. And politicians are masters at controlling the interview, they've done it so many times and when they interview somebody who has never been interviewed before they say, "Oh my God they are taking down all my words that's going to be all in there." You'll interview somebody for an hour and we take about maybe 80 words out of the interview and who decides? We do. But I think to get high school and college folks to question the answers is hard to do but those are the years when you ought to be doing that. Your mom and dad raised you and here's what's right and wrong in the world and then the church tells you and then the government tells you what's right or wrong.

Q: You said you were disappointed in yourself in your college education. I think there is some irony in this: you were looking back and saying you didn't quite take advantage. I don't know when you arrived at this way of thinking, was it pretty soon after the monastery? Does it matter when this was?

MCCARTHY: Well in the monastery we had a wonderful library and I read about 300 books a year and I wrote about a thousand words, I kept a journal [where] I wrote about a thousand words a day and that was the kind of education that really matters; it was desire driven and not fear driven. In other words there are two ways to learn; you either learn by desire or you learn by fear. Our schools teach fear, do your homework, make your grades—

Q: Or else.

MCCARTHY: Or else. So when you have fear based learning it is very artificial. Students know it, we know it and that's why I try to teach pass/fail classes; then there is no fear that the professor is going to have over you. Good professors don't want power over their students but it's hard to do in the academic setting because the dean watches us and if you give out too many A's or you are one of those softies uh uh oh no, make them suffer. So

I'll tell you some stories later about the grading policies. It's awful that's the worst thing you have to do and grading is degrading.

Q: That's a good one. We don't have to be chronological about this but may I guess that it was in the monastery that you feel your real education came?

MCCARTHY: Well I thought maybe I should try writing because I love writing.

Q: And you are a sublime writer. I'll just say that because we've all read you.

MCCARTHY: Well, it's a gift I was given but it came about oddly enough, Dan, I had a very severe speech problem when I was a little boy and I stuttered because kids made fun of me and everything and I said to myself, "My God." I was terrified to speak before the class and I was terrified of being called on to read aloud. I never knew enough to go and ask the teacher, please don't call on me because I have a speech problem; I didn't know how to do that. So I grew up with great anxieties so I said to myself what can I do in life where nobody will know that I have this handicap. Be a writer they go into a room, they close the door and no one is going to know you can't talk. I said, "Well, okay I better develop some talents to be a writer." So I started to do that and...

Q: Maybe this is an obsession on my part but I really want to know when. When did you think this?

MCCARTHY: Well when I first knew that I couldn't talk well. I was stuttering and kids would tease me and I thought oh my God.

Q: Was it in primary or secondary school already?

MCCARTHY: Yes and I was in second, third or fourth grade and in high school. So I developed a...handicapped people often do that, they develop—

Q: Compensation.

MCCARTHY: They compensate by doing something much better than they would otherwise do. So that kind of pushed me into writing and now the irony of it is I made, at least I think, a lot of money giving speeches around the country talking to colleges and every time I get a paycheck or honorarium I say, "This is crazy the boy that couldn't talk is now paid to talk." This shows you how odd it was that I could somehow overcome this speech defect.

Q: Again, this is remarkable and you reasoned this out at an age when I think the human brain is not even fully formed when you were ten or fifteen years old.

MCCARTHY: Yeah it's odd.

Q: You are a prodigy sir. I'm not trying to flatter you, this is really remarkable. I don't know a better way to do this than to go chronologically. You are leaving the monastery after a two year period initially, a three year semi-commitment and then at that point you decided that it was great; but time to do something else.

MCCARTHY: It's now 1966 and I left the monastery and had no money, I just had a contact at *The Atlanta Constitution*, there was a great editor there named Ralph McGill and Gene Patterson. Gene was the editor of *The Atlanta Constitution* and so I went to see him when I was still in the monastery and asked, "Are there any jobs here at *The Constitution*?" He said, "No, not now but I have a contact in New York with United Press International, UPI." So he called up and I was able to get a job in New York.

Q: In '66.

MCCARTHY: Yeah at UPI which is no longer, AP dominates but UPI was still a rival. So I was there from six o'clock till three in the morning taking down the race track results. I was a 25th man in a 25-man sports department; it was as low as you can go.

Q: Well that's the foundation, that's the battery, right?

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: There was money in those days

MCCARTHY: And I was thrilled to get it.

Q: Press agencies AP and UPI, Helen Thomas was UPI I think.

MCCARTHY: Yes, for many years.

Q: These are I don't know if they'll survive but these have long been the bases of information in the world because they have stringers and correspondents everywhere.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah.

Q: No one else does any longer because the industry is shrinking so disastrously. I'm sorry about UPI. AP is now the one hold out I guess and English speaking Reuters I suppose.

MCCARTHY: Reuters, yeah.

Q: And there is a pattern I think of people who work in news agencies of going in at entry level and then working their way to do something else within the agency or elsewhere.

MCCARTHY: Right.

Q: Was that the case with you?

MCCARTHY: Well when I was with UPI I had days off so I started to freelance write and I lasted only six months, there was a six-month probation. Actually, I used to get the horse race mixed up. I didn't know I put the wrong horse in first place, I didn't know the difference between place and show. Oh my God the guy can't get the horse races right. So I washed out.

Q: I don't think that's dishonorable.

MCCARTHY: All these seedy race tracks would wire the results and my job was to take them off the wire and put it on UPI wire.

Q: From one wire to another.

MCCARTHY: So I'd make mistakes and the boss would chew me out; I didn't last beyond the six month probation.

Q: Hypothetically history rewritten. If you had lasted what do you think the boss had in mind for you? What would you have wanted to do?

MCCARTHY: Well covering the hockey games and basement and all.

Q: So sports was your...

MCCARTHY: Yeah, just be a sports writer but I was bounced on out and said, "Well I better start freelance writing, so I did that. That summer, I guess, of '66 I went out to Chicago, a little town called Cicero, Illinois, where Martin Luther King was then organizing marches to integrate Cicero all white and no Blacks could rent or own their own houses. King had said that it was going to be much tougher integrating in the North and people didn't believe him. "No, no racism in the South is worse." He said, "No, there is a difference between the races. In the South it is like an open flesh wound, you can see it." You can see the muscles and the blood and you know the puss but in the North the racism is a cancer, it's on the inside and cancer is much worse than a flesh wound," he said.

He proved to be right; it was much worse in the North. The only time King ever left a march was that summer and I was there in Cicero. Someone threw a big rock, sort of a brick like object, out of the crowd. Marching down the street came the civil rights people and crowds on both sides shouting epithets the whole works. Then someone threw this enormous projectile and hit him in the chest; the only time he ever left a march out of fear was that summer. So I wrote about it and started sending articles into *The Washington Post* and I sent something to *The New Republic* and...

Q: The New Republic.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, which was then a very good liberal magazine. If you were reading *The New Republic* then you were suddenly...

Q: Walter Lippman.

MCCARTHY: Yes.

Q: But did you go to Cicero for this reason?

MCCARTHY: Well I was going to write an article because I knew King was there and I sold a piece to *The National Catholic Reporter*, which was then just two years old. It started out in '64 and I sent it in and they ran it. Then I wrote some more things for The National Catholic Reporter and one time I wrote about a poverty program in Harlem that was run by Sargent Shriver who had just started the poverty program when he left the Peace Corps; the office of economic opportunity. So I wrote about it and Sargent Shriver happened to read that article and I kind of took a couple whacks at him. I said, "You know [this] isn't quite as good as it sounds," I took a couple of jabs at him. He called me up...

Q: Shriver? Jabs?

MCCARTHY: I took a couple of shots at him about the program.

Q: Ahh, I see, I see.

MCCARTHY: So he read the article and tracked me down; I was then in Kansas City at the office of *National Catholic Reporter*. He calls up and says, "You know I read this article you wrote about and you criticized me. You know I'm just starting up the poverty program and I've got a big problem here. I'm surrounded by so many yes men that I need a no man and you seem to definitely qualify as a no man."

Q: This is a great man. This is what greatness is.

MCCARTHY: As he said, yeah.

Q: As we embark on this terrific thing it sounds like you were not only a no man you were a nomad it sounds like because you were in Chicago...

MCCARTHY: Well I was wandering around the country, yeah.

Q: ...New York City, New York; you were constantly moving I think.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Well we've got you in Kansas City now at The National Catholic Reporter.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, Sarge called up and said, "I need to talk to you. I need a speechwriter and kind of an assistant."

Q: The year?

MCCARTHY: Summer of '66, I guess the fall of '66. I came...

Q: Wait; let's put this in American history context. President Kennedy has been assassinated.

MCCARTHY: Right.

Q: Martin Luther King lives until 1968.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, this was two years before Kennedy [sic] and King would lose their lives.

Q: Rapidly, yes. So at this time Shriver had worked with President Kennedy and was now with the office of economic opportunity under Johnson?

MCCARTHY: Johnson yeah.

Q: Okay.

MCCARTHY: Head Start, Job Corps, Legal Services, Outward Bound, Community Action -- all these great social programs, which are still there. When people talk about the sixties it's not Woodstock or Bob Dylan or potheads it's those social programs, which are still there.

Q: Hanging on, hanging on.

MCCARTHY: Plus Medicare and Medicaid plus also Social Security and they are still there, that's why the sixties are a misunderstood decade.

Q: Head Start, Job Corps, Community Action...

MCCARTHY: Legal Services, Foster Grandparents, these programs that many people don't know about but are still functioning.

Q: What was Johnson's role in this was he permitting or guiding this?

MCCARTHY: Well it was part of the great society programs that started when Johnson came in late '63. You had the Voting Rights Act, you had the Civil Rights Movement and plus you had Shriver running the Poverty Programs and doing very well at it; so I would travel the country with Sarge. He needed a speechwriter like Muhammad Ali needed a boxing lesson.

Q: As you said.

MCCARTHY: Or Stradivarius or string violins.

Q: I remember your column the day after Shriver passed away.

MCCARTHY: I put that in. Oh you are nice to remember that Dan.

Q: If I had been Shriver I would have required a Stradivarius also.

MCCARTHY: He was torn because he was opposed to the Vietnam War but he didn't want to break loyalty with Johnson but he saw the program. But he went to every office in Congress to get those programs underway. I mean he worked the political machine so deftly.

Q: So you were attached hip-to-hip as his speechwriter.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Did he try any ideas out on you also because he needed a no man?

MCCARTHY: I wasn't one of these policy guys, I was just the guy who would go on the trips with him and put a few thoughts down for his speeches.

Q: Were you based in D.C. at that time?

MCCARTHY: Yeah and then so that summer I met a woman working at OEO then and she was a nurse. I think I met her in December 1966 and we married five weeks later. I thought that was a long time to wait but she was a little on the conservative side and she said can we wait a couple of weeks.

Q: You stayed in a Trappist Monastery for five years but couldn't wait five weeks.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: To marry this nurse. You became more impetuous than in the church.

MCCARTHY: Let's not fiddle around, let's get this done.

Q: Great.

MCCARTHY: So it was one of those big terrific moments when you meet somebody and you say wow this is it and we've been married all these years. We have three boys and so I've had an extremely charmed life Dan, and I'm always waiting to get run over by a car or something and end it all.

Q: Seems as though that happened twice it says here.

MCCARTHY: Oh I've had two crashes yeah but...

Q: I resist your rhetorical march to the end because I want to get to the middle. Tell us about a couple of trips with Shriver, the sorts of places you went to.

MCCARTHY: Oh, we went to Watts after the Watts fires -- remember the fires in Watts? We went to Mount Bayou, Mississippi, an all Black town right on the Delta. We opened a health clinic there and I wrote about it for *The Post* while I was there. The first piece I wrote for the *Post* was for Mount Bayou, Mississippi; it ran in the Outlook section. So, I got my foot in the door at *The Post* and then I kept writing for it. I worked for Sarge for two years until the end of Johnson and then he was appointed by Nixon to be the ambassador to France. Oddly enough so Eunice wanted to go to France that's the only reason Sarge went; he didn't like Nixon but Nixon wanted to show that he wasn't absolutely totally Republican.

Q: He needed a token other sider.

MCCARTHY: So Sarge went to France with Eunice and the family and had a great time. Then I was on my own and *The Post* offered me a job. I never applied for a job; I kept sending articles in and finally I was asked to write...

Q: This is too symmetrical. Five years monastery, five weeks engaged, two years employed by the federal government and then straight over to The Post; it sounds too symmetrical.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, well ...

Q: It didn't seem so at the time did it?

MCCARTHY: There were good tail winds; I've had a life of tailwinds.

Q: Fantastic.

MCCARTHY: When I'd interviewed him I kept asking them how we go about...

Q: What we are talking about Colman is your assignments while at The Post in interviewing people of importance in the Peace Movement. So let's pick it up there.

MCCARTHY: Well, I was invited to be an editorial writer at *The Post* by Philip Geyelin. Ben Bradley was the big name at *The Post* and Katherine Graham was there, they were the two very prominent people. But Phil Geyelin ran the editorial page and he hired me to be an editorial writer and write columns as many as I wanted to so it was a lucky break.

And just as I'd had a lucky break being found by Sarge Shriver now I got lucky again by being hired at *The Post* because I kept sending articles in.

Q: These were hotbeds, these were not staff editorials or did you do both.

MCCARTHY: I did both. Editorials are the unsigned and then the columns were on the Op Ed page so I dove in: your first obligation was to do editorials. We'd meet every morning about ten of us and we'd float around what are you going to do tomorrow, what are you working on? It was all very collegial and cordial.

Q: We are in the '60s and '70s.

MCCARTHY: 1969 and I was hired by *The Post*. And when suddenly you have this platform you can get people to call you back because they want something.

Q: They want their story in the paper the way they want it but they don't get it exactly the way they want it.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, yeah so I got to know all kinds of people, the politicians, the artists, the whole works.

Q: You say people called back, whom did you call in that...

MCCARTHY: Well I got to know, I became very close with many people but one I got to know pretty well, was Joan Baez, the folk singer. She would come back through Washington from her tours; she's been one of the great people I hold with high regard.

Q: A great artist, a great conscience.

MCCARTHY: A pacifist and she'd go to Argentina, go to Chile meeting all the dictators, go to the Soviet Union, go to Turkey all these places and often come back through Washington going to her home in Woodside, California, and bring me documents of political prisoners that she'd get while she was overseas. So I'd write columns based on information that she would give me.

Q: So with some risk, I guess, she took documents out of countries and she chose you as the one person she could trust.

MCCARTHY: So we became very close and I remember she was singing here at, I think, at Constitution Hall and I said, can you come talk to my high school class? I was then teaching at School Without Walls a D.C. high school; the closest school to the White House and one of the poorest schools in America. So she said, "No, I don't want to talk to the three o'clock class. I'm getting ready for the concert then but bring the class to the concert and we'll have a little seminar backstage." So she gave us about \$2,000 worth of comp tickets so I brought about 30 students over and a lot of them didn't know who Joan was but the moms and dads knew and they wanted to take the kids tickets. So I said,

“Well you know just come I’ll try to crash in there.” So I was able to crash them in and so we all went. So the moms and dads came and Joan was there and she supplied some food for everybody and she gave a great seminar.

Q: This is after the concert?

MCCARTHY: After the concert right back stage.

Q: At the DAR Hall?

MCCARTHY: Yeah, you know so there she was and she’s done that repeatedly ever since at least a dozen times. The last time was at the Strathmore she was out at Bethesda. Then I took them out to Wolf Trap as she sang there a couple of times and she sang at the Kennedy Center.

Q: The cart is leading the horse here, the story untold here. Wait a minute, you were teaching while a staff ghost writer, you were teaching at a high school?

MCCARTHY: Well in 1982 I’d interviewed so many of these great peacemakers and I’d always ask them how do we increase peace and decrease violence. They almost always gave the same answer: you need to go where people are because people keep having conflicts and solving them either through violent force or non-violent force; there is no fair way to do it. So I thought the advice was sound and said, “Where are the people where do you find people?” In schools they are there every day. The buildings are there and the people are there so I went to the closest school to my office School Without Walls right on 25th and G Street, five blocks west of the White House and five blocks East of Watergate; you had money and power and in between this little poor school built during the Grant administration. There is no cafeteria, no gym, no auditorium, no lockers, no athletic field and for many years no clean drinking water and no president has ever gone there. We kept inviting them but no president could make it the five blocks.

Q: This is Foggy Bottom, is this part of the D.C. public system?

MCCARTHY: Yes. It’s a D.C. high school and the school was always kind of a metaphor. There were a lot of internships, they believe in experiential and not theoretical learning. If you want to learn about health care go get an internship at GW hospital just three blocks away, if you want to learn about politics get an internship opening mail for some Congressman, if you want to be a musician go to the Kennedy Center. No matter what you wanted to do there are places in D.C. you can walk to and go learn experientially; that is what the school is about.

Q: Any comments about Charter Schools?

MCCARTHY: I don’t know enough about them. I know like many other things some of them are working well and some of them aren’t.

Q: Let's go back to the individuals you interviewed. You say that a number of them gave you a similar answer when you how do we make peace; they said go to the people. Unlike a normal journalist you actually did what they suggested. Journalists usually observe. You actually put it into practice. Who told you these things?

MCCARTHY: Well I just was fascinated because it was kind of a new beat; *The Post* has a lot of war correspondents but no peace correspondents. There are two kinds of journalists: there are those who are problem describers and there are those who are solution finders. They write about solutions and I thought that is what I wanted to do. We got enough people telling us what kind of a mess we are in every day.

Q: Which is sometimes thought of as a special contribution of the 1960s and '70s a description of the mess?

MCCARTHY: Which is needed. That's good I'm not putting it down.

Q: No, no, but very few dedicated themselves to this second scenario you just mentioned.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Now when we were off the mic you mentioned Desmond Tutu and some others. Were you able to travel to where they were or did you catch them when they were in Washington?

MCCARTHY: Oh they come through Washington so you had access right away.

Q: Once again can we get the ones that come to mind? Tutu, the one from Ireland Mary...

MCCARTHY: Mairead Corrigan.

Q: Corrigan.

MCCARTHY: The one who won the Nobel Prize she's now known as Mairead Maguire I think but it was Corrigan; she and Betty Williams won the Nobel. One was from the North and one was from the South; I interviewed Mother Teresa a couple times.

Q: This is usually when they happen to be in D.C.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, yeah. You know you go find them and...

Q: There were one or two others: Tutu, Corrigan, Mother Teresa...

MCCARTHY: Adolfo Peres Esquivel from Buenos Aires and he won the Nobel Peace Prize

Q: No not for the name recognition but what did you find in common among these individuals? You said that they had similar answers to your question and they said collectively I think go to where the people are. Did you find any other parallels in these extremely diverse people? A South African, an Irish, Mother Teresa is Albanian, an Argentine you can't find a more diverse group but they were all Nobel Prize winners.

MCCARTHY: Well that's just a fluky thing I mean how do you win the Nobel you can't plan on that it's odd who they pick but I've always thought the really worthy people of that prize ought to be two qualifications. You need to be shot at or imprisoned.

Q: But you can do one of the two is that it?

MCCARTHY: Yeah, but when you give the Nobel Prize to...

Q: That's very kind of you to give a choice.

MCCARTHY: But they give it to so many clinkers, Dan. Kissinger got one, and Kissinger got it with a general from North Viet Nam who refused it. "I don't deserve this," he said, but Kissinger just took it; he's always a loathsome...of all the people that guy's responsible for killing. And then you have...

Q: Bangladesh. We sometimes forget his connection to the slaughter in Bangladesh.

MCCARTHY: I didn't know that about Kissinger. Kissinger was involved in Bangladesh? Or do you mean Indonesia?

Q: Active in allowing that conflict to go forward. There was an involvement which caused hundreds of thousands deaths.

MCCARTHY: I know he went to East Timor with Gerald Ford when Suharto was the president or the dictator but they sent him weapons.

Q: Right. Yep and we saw late last week so...

MCCARTHY: Bangladesh too; I'll look that up.

Q: There was some incident in the Senate.

MCCARTHY: Oh I love this, I love this. I hold McCain with highest regards.

Q: I'm the interviewer. I shouldn't say that I have an opinion but I do have a strong opinion which is the same as yours. I think McCain's quote was "Get out of here you scum."

MCCARTHY: Oh yes, "You low life scum," yeah.

Q: That's a phrase that should be remembered.

MCCARTHY: But I think that was an issue of accountability by not walking away from your record. Plus what he did in Chile all through Allende, what he did in East Timor...

Q: He didn't do it by himself but he was part of the plan.

MCCARTHY: Oh yes absolutely, an awful, awful but now oh the guru, the sage, the wise man...

Q: He's teaching at a Jesuit University in Georgetown; he's been with Georgetown all these years.

MCCARTHY: Has he really? I knew he was there for a while...

Q: It's not for me to have an opinion.

MCCARTHY: I know that Albright has been there. I'll check because I'm going to do a column about the incident last week with all these colored pages.

Oh yeah awful, awful Georgetown. Their Foreign Service School is a feeder school to the CIA and their right wing State Department. I'll tell you some stories about it but my treatment in Georgetown.

Q: I wish I could get an opinion out of you about... Again I'm not dazzled by famous names but do you see any pattern in the four that you mentioned, the Nobels?

MCCARTHY: Well they all had a passion for what they were doing but I like being around passionate people no matter what their views are. I brought three of them out to my high school class I brought Mairead Corrigan to my Bethesda Chevy Chase High School class and she arrived at 7:25 a.m. I brought Perez Escovel to the high school, he came and I brought Muhammad Yunus. Now Muhammad came before he won the Nobel Prize and he came out and he was an obscure economist making loans to poor people. I took him back to the metro and I said, "Muhammad you are going to win the Nobel Prize some day," and he laughed at me.

Q: Do you remember when you told him this?

MCCARTHY: He came to my class I think in the mid-eighties 1985 and I think he won it in the mid-nineties he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Q: Well Colman this is your opportunity. If you think that I might win the Nobel someday do you want to tell me so now?

MCCARTHY: Well I will tell you Dan just get shot at and get put in jail, okay, and I'll nominate you.

Q: I don't know if they'll take your nomination but when I'm in jail I'll be encouraged by that thought.

MCCARTHY: But when you have people like Al Gore, Jimmy Carter who sold weapons to El Salvador and armed the Mid-East when he was president, a big arms trader, and then Obama getting a Nobel Peace Prize and Kissinger getting one it just cheapens the whole thing plus they gave it to a few others.

Q: Now the Nobel Prize doesn't come from heaven, it comes from Norway.

MCCARTHY: The Peace Prize is Norway, the Swede's do the other, but Norway does the Peace Prize; it is so unfathomable how it works.

Q: We sometimes think of the Nobel as coming straight from heaven or something. It is human beings and there is a political process.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah, absolutely, Obama should have declined it.

Q: They say that he seriously considered doing that but that he understood, I think, that he received the prize because he was not George Bush and that he felt that being part of that scenario would render a service of some sort. So as your work at The Post continued your work in secondary education increased.

MCCARTHY: Well, I was invited to School Without Walls to come teach. I gave a talk there at a student assembly and the principal said, "We'd love to have you come teach a class on writing." I said, "No, I'd rather teach peace." He said, "Well there's no class like that here but if you want to come and give it a try you come over." "One problem though," she said "we are a poor school and we can't afford to pay you." I said, "I didn't come for the dollar, I came to find out if you can teach peace like any other academic subject." So the course began and it went well and then I took it to American University and then I was invited to go to Georgetown Law School and I was invited by the University of Maryland and then I was invited to teach at Wilson High School so after a while I was teaching eight classes at six different schools.

Q: My gosh.

MCCARTHY: I did that for a fair amount of time and after Walls I went to AU and I came here, I think, in '84.

Q: Still at The Post?

MCCARTHY: Yeah, still at *The Post*. So I was able to teach a class in the morning or the evening and didn't take that much time away from my being at The Post; I was a columnist by then so I was pretty much on my own time. They don't care where you go,

just get your column in twice a week. So I was able to do the columns and do the teaching.

Q: I'm sure you must have known Walter Pinkus?

MCCARTHY: Yes, oh yeah, Walter is one of those stalwarts and he's still there and writes great. He's not a pacifist, he's not opposed to the military but he does good writing.

Q: He's accurate, I think.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah.

Q: He gets the real numbers of what's happening.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, he has plenty of good sources and you might be one of them.

Q: I know many of us wish we knew who the sources were. I want to start a second interview in a short time within a few days, and go back through some of this material and engage new material to catch up to the present.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, that's good, that's good.

Q: Let's say goodbye for today, it's February 3rd and this is section 5 of this interview, Colman McCarthy thank you so much.

* * *

Okay, this is Dan Whitman interviewing Colman McCarthy for our second time we've been together on this. It's now February 19th and we are in the library at American University. Colman we went through a lot of biographical material, an astonishing amount actually, but I wanted to recapture at least from the 1980s, if not earlier, and I think to hook some of the narrative I want to ask you about your evolution as a specialist in peace studies and your pacifist beliefs. I would like to ask approximately when that became exactly crystallized and clear to you and if you remember the sequence of experiences and of accumulation of knowledge that got you to that point.

MCCARTHY: Sure, I had gone to a Jesuit college in Mobile, Alabama, called Spring Hill College. It had a ROTC, Reserved Officers Training Corps, program which I thought was out of place on a campus, and it was a military program and many of my classmates were in the program. So I didn't think that campus ought to be a place where you don't teach the methods of military violence to solve conflicts. Militaries are hired to solve conflicts with violence or the threats of violence. I thought a university or college ought not to be a host to that type of education.

Q: A couple of questions on that, Colman. First, this was a Jesuit college and I would like to ask if you can talk us through the consistency or inconsistency in particular of it being

a religiously affiliated college? Secondly, when you had this reaction to ROTC I'm really curious whether that came at that moment or whether this was a belief that you previously developed and suddenly it became an issue at this time?

MCCARTHY: Well I graduated in 1960 so these are from '56 to '60 and I just thought it was incongruous particularly since this was a Catholic school, supposedly a Christian denomination, and one that was not being faithful to what I believe Christ's message was to be peacemakers.

Q: Did you know before going to Spring Hill College that there was an ROTC element and did you...

MCCARTHY: No, not really. I just learned when I went there and then I started to investigate and even today there is still a program there. Many of the Catholic schools have flourishing ROTC programs; Notre Dame is the biggest of all. I think ten percent of the undergraduates are in that program. I've written about that so I think the numbers are still accurate. Georgetown has one, Boston College has one and Catholicism is not a peace church; it is nowhere close to the Mennonites or the Church of the Brethren or the Quakers or the Bruderhof's; all peace churches. So I think they are betraying the message of Christ.

Q: You mentioned in our last conversation that you'd been disillusioned with the Catholic Church and the directions it's taken recently. I don't know what I mean by recently, in the last century let's say and yet there was incongruity at the Jesuit college in Alabama. Do you now see that Catholic training has really abandoned the intentions of Jesus Christ?

MCCARTHY: If you argue that Christ taught non-violence loving your enemy I mean that's hard to do. So if it's there why don't we practice that and so the church is another organization and it has its rules. If you don't like the rules, okay there are other places to go. So they believe in supplying chaplains to the military; I forget the percentage of military personnel who are Roman Catholics but I think it's fairly high. They supply chaplains and there's a military victorate I think it's called here in D.C. So I think it's...

Q: Sounds contradictory doesn't it. Looking back, do you have regrets that you went to a Jesuit college?

MCCARTHY: Not at all. They were very kind to me, I was on the golf team and I played golf. I liked my professorship and they gave me an honorary degree in 1997 and so...

Q: You passed over that so briefly; an honorary degree that's a major honor.

MCCARTHY: I don't know about that.

Q: We are out of chronological sequence but please continue.

MCCARTHY: There's a funny story about that.

Q: Please do.

MCCARTHY: I was invited in 1997 and there was another recipient of an honorary degree who was far more deserving, Harper Lee, who's in the news right now.

Q: Really, very much so. Rediscovered a new novel that no one ever knew about.

MCCARTHY: So I'm there and I told the president the night before, "Listen, have Harper Lee give the talk okay, she's the star, I'm just a minor satellite that is revolving around an unknown moon."

Q: I hope that they disregarded your request.

MCCARTHY: Well they asked Harper and she declined months before. So I said, "Have Harper do it but she's very reclusive and it was funny how it turned out. When I was writing my columns I'd get letters from students saying you're wrong, you're right, and I put the letters aside. They are just kids. I don't need to pay attention to letters from kids. So I was being a little bit haughty so I'm sitting up on stage with Harper Lee and the grads are coming across to get their diplomas and I started talking to her. I said, "Are you writing much these days?" And she says, "Yes, I write all the time. I write almost every day." I said to myself oh my God how I have missed her last book. You know you try to keep up and finally I said, "Harper, I am very embarrassed but what was the name of your last book I want to get it."

Q: To Kill a Mockingbird.

MCCARTHY: Right. She said, "No, I don't write books, I write letters to school children." I was so touched by that.

Q: Oh my gosh.

MCCARTHY: Here's this great writer in eighth grade, tenth grade, I loved Atticus Finch. I want to be a lawyer too some day, I'm just like Scout.

Q: Oh my gosh.

MCCARTHY: So if Harper Lee can write these kids I said, Listen buddy, get on your game and start answering those letters.

Q: A marvelous story. Was there a connection between Harper Lee and this college?

MCCARTHY: That was the first honorary degree she ever accepted and I think she'll get one later at Notre Dame years later but never from a Jesuit school or a Catholic school.

Q: So it was Harper Lee and Colman McCarthy in 1997.

MCCARTHY: Well I think the reason she did it was because she lived in Monroeville, a small village in-between Montgomery and Mobile. She rarely left the little town, lived there with her sister and neither married and Harper Lee makes about \$3 million a year from her residuals. I started answering my letters so my next book, coming out next month, is letters from my students. I don't know if I gave you that blurb last week or not, maybe I didn't.

Q: You gave me a blurb but it was not that one.

MCCARTHY: It's called *Teaching Peace: Students Exchange Letters with Their Teacher*. It's about fifty letters and some are writing me from the Peace Corps from Mali and some are in grad school and some had families. So I started to write answers to the letters and found a publisher so that's on the way; it all goes back to that time I met Harper Lee down there in Alabama.

Q: Colman, you are not into self promotion. You've mentioned astonishing things, an honorary degree, a book about to come out, how do I ask the right questions to get this?

MCCARTHY: There's not much there.

Q: Where do I get Teaching Peace? Can I order it now?

MCCARTHY: Vaudeville Press. I'm going to give a talk over at Politics and Prose, I think, on March 15th but I'll email that to you.

Q: Thank you so much, this is marvelous.

MCCARTHY: The funny thing about that book is I had to track down about 50 former students and that took about a year and a half. Some of them moved, they weren't in college any more, they were in Northern China, some were in African countries, and some became doctors. I mean just tracking because you had to get permission for their letters.

Q: Of course.

MCCARTHY: So that was a tough one but I slogged through, you had to send them a form with a return envelope. They don't know what envelopes are anymore, this generation, they don't know what a post office is, what stamps are; it's all done with these machines.

Q: An envelope is just a form of paper that folds upon itself. The readers of this interview may have never heard of these things but look it up, just look it up if you are listening or reading this.

MCCARTHY: You know, so I started taking this seriously thanks to that off-hand comment she made.

Q: So it was Harper Lee who gave you both the idea and the sense of responsibility.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, if you are going to be a writer do your writing even if it's to a letter that probably no one will ever read except the recipient; but in this case more people will read it hopefully.

Q: I call these coffee mug expressions. If you are going to be a writer, I'll repeat it, do your writing; this is a great notion.

MCCARTHY: I remember interviewing Paul Engle who is a great professor of English at the University of Iowa and he founded and directed for years The Iowa's Writers Workshop.

Q: Yes, yes.

MCCARTHY: I think many great writers went out and I think Philip Roth may have gone there; but many great writers. In fact, he invited me out to give a talk there one time at the university and I asked him, "How do you define quality writing?" Quality writing is rewriting what you've already rewritten." I thought that got to it.

Q: Very nice.

MCCARTHY: College folks have lost their writing skill, I think, I'm sure you've noticed this Dan. I mean you rarely get a paper that really comes along with metaphorical or allegorical language.

Q: Many of us who work with students are wondering why this is.

MCCARTHY: Well they don't teach it in high school or elementary school. Plus they have these iPads and texting and tweeting and they don't write long hand letters. I mean, I was amazed that about half are handwritten letters from the students and others are email but that's okay but...

Q: I promise I won't drag us into the public noise about electronic devices but do you think having them there are advantages and disadvantages do you think the disadvantages outweigh any of the advantages of having students connected to this huge [network]?

MCCARTHY: Well it makes research a lot easier, you can look up and get the low down on almost anybody just Google the name and you can't hide anymore.

Q: So that's good for the researcher, bad for the person trying to hide.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, right, right.

Q: When you found your fifty students in China and Africa, how much assistance was the Internet? Did it do half of your fifty?

MCCARTHY: Well some of the emails change and when you graduate from college you lose your college email and then some were slow to reply. Out of about 50 only one student refused to let me use her letter.

Q: But it took a year and a half to find them.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah but you had to just slog through it and the publicist was firm about it. I had already asked them and they said sure go ahead but the publicist said, "No, you've got to get it in writing because I had some by word of mouth.

Q: Yes, of course, because that's intellectual property.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah, oh yeah, so I was amazed.

Q: Back to what you were saying about the quality of writing today. It's commonplace that the quality of writing has gone down really very radically. And by the way, reading the Associated Press I don't think they've decided whether a period goes inside the quotation marks or outside, they just alternate."

MCCARTHY: Yes, yeah.

Q: As if you could get it 50 percent right: there is unbelievable sloppiness. Again, is it just the appearance of these electronic devices or is there something else that's making us stupid?

MCCARTHY: I have a whole list of words that I never use myself but when I see others using the word very is an extremely weak adjective, another word interesting, it was an interesting thing that I noticed, everything is interesting, that blank wall is interesting. Or the word nice, it would be very nice to get her. That's an automatic C.

Q: At best. I would add to that the two weakest words in the English language -- it is which seems to be used to begin many, many sentences, which means nothing, it is our intention. Anyway, so why is it that people use these words more? Are they impoverished of vocabulary or something?

MCCARTHY: I always ask them early in the semester to take out a blank piece of paper and write down all the words you can think of beginning with the letters AB. They are the first words in the dictionary; how many do you know? So I say, "I'm giving you five minutes and whoever gets the most gets an award, I'm going to give you a prize." So they thought oh well and they started writing down...

Q: Abdomen, abominable and I can't think of many others.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, you know, so the most I've ever gotten was maybe 20 or 25. So I tell them go home tonight and open up your unabridged dictionary, which I'm sure you have one next to your night stand, oh yes, sure you do. There will be about 150 AB words there, learn them all and if you learn those go through the AC words, the AD words and write on further through the dictionary down to zygotes which all of you are former zygotes anyway. So you will be ending up with yourself.

Q: Oh God that is great. This is startling, admirable and very, very funny. Can you articulate what is your goal for those students when you put them through this agony?

MCCARTHY: Well just to tell them that if you learn to write well you have an advantage in this world. What advantage? Well it may help your working life or your professional life if you know how to write well, yeah.

Q: You will be expanding your vocabulary.

MCCARTHY: You know because sometime you are going to have to write something and not all jobs require writing but if you write well people notice it and they appreciate it. If you see a good metaphor...

Q: Do you find bad writing disappointing or offensive or both?

MCCARTHY: Well you understand there is just kind of laziness, I think, people don't make an effort to acquire a vocabulary that matches the insights in their mind. Most people are highly intelligent but they don't know how to get that into words, so if you don't have the words to match your intelligence the intelligence will not shine through, because that's all you have are words and words matter.

Q: I'm going by memory here and that's probably not exactly right. I think I remember a study performed at Harvard -- the average vocabulary of freshman in the 1950s was 20 thousand words and the average vocabulary of freshman in the 1970s was 5 thousand words at Harvard. I don't know if that means anything or...

MCCARTHY: Yeah, you can probably find that there's probably some studies done on that.

Q: About one quarter of what it used to be. Maybe there is no point in assigning blame for television first. Maybe it's important to note that for whatever reason the ability to articulate has fallen.

MCCARTHY: Oh sure because literature is the only art form you take around with you. You go into an art gallery, the painting stays there and you go to the symphony, but books and magazines you can haul it around with you anywhere it's the only art form that is like that that is portable.

Q: Each one has attributes that the others don't have. You mentioned some of your former students being in the Peace Corps and in this morning's Washington Post, this is February 19th mentions that this university[American University] is number two in the country for Peace Corps volunteers.

MCCARTHY: That's nice, that's nice.

Q: I think it's written on the side of every one of these shuttle buses.

MCCARTHY: That's great, yeah.

Q: I don't know the numbers. It's not huge numbers; there are 40 or 50 per year. Sargent Shriver, Peace Corps; any comment about that endeavor where it stands now? Should it be fully funded, is it really an instrument of peace?

MCCARTHY: Well often what happens and I said I've had well over 100 or 200 go into the Peace Corps but almost always you hear the same refrain, "I got a lot more out of it than what the people I was serving got out of it," and many come back home feeling slightly guilty that they benefitted so much from it. I said, "No, don't feel that way, that's not true you didn't go into it for self-serving motives you went in with pretty pure motives I think. Most of them do.

Q: Well many of them live with mosquitoes and cholera; it's not the easiest lifestyle.

MCCARTHY: Yeah and many come back home, it's very common they come back and have a reentry trauma. They are over there in the bush country and you know that they go into Senegal and suddenly a week later they are back at Whole Foods with 80 varieties of cheese and 90 varieties of cereal.

Q: It's very shocking.

MCCARTHY: There they had rice and beans for almost two years.

Q: So the Peace Corps experience. Do you think that the Peace Corps today is pretty much the way Sargent Shriver would have wanted it to be?

MCCARTHY: Oh I think so, oh sure. They're taking a lot more people with expertise now like engineers, people like that mostly it was liberal arts graduates when Sarge started out. Then another of my former students, Mark Gearan, who became the director of Peace Corps. Do you know Mark Gearan?

Q: I do.

MCCARTHY: How do you know him?

Q: He was introduced to a group of students at the Washington Internship Institute and he spent some time with thirty of us and we spoke with him.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, and I had Mark at Georgetown Law School in 1988. Then he became director of Peace Corps because he was just about the first person to sign on with this obscure governor from Arkansas...

Q: Bill Clinton.

MCCARTHY: Presidential ambition but nobody gave him a million-to-one chance of getting the presidency. So Mark signed on with Bill Clinton and I guess in 1990 because Mark was working for the Democratic Governor's Association and that is how he got to know Clinton. He signed on early and then Clinton went on to win and so Mark was made communications director in the White House.

Q: Yep.

MCCARTHY: Then in '95, I think, Carol Bellamy who was in the Peace Corps left and then Mark got that job.

Q: And he was a student of yours?

MCCARTHY: I had him at Georgetown Law.

Q: This was before Aaron Williams?

MCCARTHY: Yes, oh yes, after Mark I think who was the woman, she was a Republican from Northern Michigan oh Loret Miller. Loret Miller was heir to the Miller beer fortune and she married a Congressman Philip Ruppe and Loret is a good example because she's a Republican, a Bush appointee and oh she shouldn't be running the Peace Corps, no, no, no. Turns out she was a great director, took no salary and was the only director I think maybe there was another, the only one to ever have a child join the Peace Corps; none of the Shriver kids ever joined the Peace Corps and none of the Kennedys ever joined the Peace Corps. So that was Loret, a Republican appointee and turned out to be a good competent head of the agency.

Q: We have to talk about polarized American politics now. Is it possible you just gave a great example of someone on one side of political debate performing for the greater good? Is this going to be more or less possible in the future to have the noise be reduced and the mutually beneficial actions increased? Do you see any of this happening?

MCCARTHY: Well it's probably contaminated by money I think, Dan. I think there is so much money involved that's all it's talked about in politics that's all they talk about. Is Jeb going to raise more money than Huckabee? There's a one page piece in *The Post* today about the Clinton Foundation.

Q: Billions, billions.

MCCARTHY: Yes, so it has become so monetized that it's very difficult to figure out. Even though there are many good people in Congress, that I think causes some difficulties.

Q: In conversation I would not ask you this but this is for an interview. Do you feel that one political party is more motivated to promote peace in the world than another?

MCCARTHY: Well the problem is very few in Congress have ever studied peace. I know no member of Congress who holds a peace studies degree.

Q: Well there aren't many such degrees around.

MCCARTHY: So there it is they don't know the alternatives to violence. Obama doesn't know it, they know it but they think it will never work. So now we have to go after ISIS, we have to go kill them off and before it was the Taliban and then it was this and then it was Saddam Hussein and on and on it goes. So the alternatives are not being taught. Peace hasn't failed it hasn't been tried except in a few cases like Marcos was overthrown by non-violence, Pinochet was brought down non-violently, Vaclav Havel became president non-violently, the Republic of Georgia fell through non-violent actions, Lech Walesa in Poland is an example. Lech Walesa no army no military only six Poles were killed in all of the years of Russian occupation, only six and no one ever thought that the Soviet Union would fall except with a major Third World War and you and I grew up in that era.

Q: I know. No one ever thought that Poland could become a successful liberal democracy but it has done so.

MCCARTHY: All because of this one guy, a shipyard worker who never went to college.

Q: By the way, most of these leaders who lead their countries, I think Havel, Walesa, I think there are other examples, have since been rejected by the people who vote in those countries. What's going on there?

MCCARTHY: Well you know if the country has no long tradition of conflict resolution skills it's very difficult to sustain it.

Q: Poland and the Czech Republic are not exactly taken up in conflict; Hungary potentially yes. But the various examples of the most successful ones -- I'm not even sure this is really even a question; it's a comment I guess. It seems ironic that those who lead and you just mentioned Walesa and Havel, who currently I'm told are not actually appreciated by the young people in their own countries. Maybe it's a lack of memory.

MCCARTHY: It could be I can just speculate but I don't have any precise answers.

Q: Right. I'm guessing, however, if we could bring Sargent Shriver here he would be dismayed at the [small] amount of budget that's been put aside for the Peace Corps; it seems to go down and down.

MCCARTHY: The director was here just about a month ago talking to the dean, you know how they have the lectures so she was here. She said that, "They turned down more qualified applicants and this is a sad thing. Most people who applied are well qualified."

Q: Right, I think they accept one out of ten or something.

MCCARTHY: Or something.

Q: As if it were a fancy college but it's the Peace Corps.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, some number like that.

Q: Really only because of lack of money.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, yeah. The Pentagon spends, I think, about eight times more money in a day than the Peace Corps gets in a year. It's hard to wrap our heads around that but if you check the military budget whatever it is...

Q: \$ 600 billion or something like that.

MCCARTHY: Something like that. See the military budget doesn't include the national security program so when you add them all together it's about \$900 billion plus Homeland Security when you put them all together.

Q: Well it's okay, the Speaker of the House this week said we can just not fund Homeland Security next week.

MCCARTHY: Is that right?

Q: He said it twice he said, "It's okay we can let the budget expire." It's a very astonishing remark, which he repeated. I don't claim to understand but there we go eight times the money per day, DOD, than the Peace Corps in a year. This shows an imbalance and a ridiculous overstatement.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, oh yeah, and the same for AmeriCorps which is a good program. AmeriCorps you can join when you are 18; the Peace Corps you have to be 22. But AmeriCorps is in this country so they are more cautious about sending people overseas.

Q: Well they have less money I don't know.

MCCARTHY: I don't know the budgets of AmeriCorps, I think it is fairly the same I'm not sure.

Q: I think it is modest, I don't know if you've spoken to Peter Edelman who...

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah.

Q: ...created the idea I think.

MCCARTHY: Oh did he really?

Q: Yep, yep, the idea of the triangular system where the volunteer assists the community, the government pays a university for the fees that the volunteer later uses to go to the university, which is a very brilliant system.

MCCARTHY: Oh is that right, oh right so that's good.

Q: But, but it requires seed money from the federal government and, of course, that is always going to have its limits.

MCCARTHY: We are a militarized economy, no question about it.

Q: You teach Peace Studies with the intention of correcting that situation. What is your strategy, pardon the use of that word, and what is the degree of your belief that this can be corrected?

MCCARTHY: Well Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the great Jesuit, once said his argument is that we are now living in the eighth day of creation. The first seven days the land and or the firmament and now the eighth day we are going to create not the physical structure but the intellectual and moral structure. So we are still on the predawn of the eighth day. We are just coming out of the primordial ooze.

Q: The mud of the bubbling sulfur.

MCCARTHY: We just separated from the salamanders just about a million years ago.

Q: Recently.

MCCARTHY: Yes, very recently.

Q: It might have been more than a million but it's like the Pentagon budget; the zeros go on and on.

MCCARTHY: We don't know where we came from or where we are going. All we know is we are here for just a very nanosecond.

Q: This is an audio recording, therefore we cannot see the beautiful expression on your face happening right now accepting the ironies of what you are saying and yet in your

face I think I read a certain determination and a belief that if we are at the dawn of the period we shouldn't be consumed with impatience and disillusionment. We should just simply proceed; am I putting words in your mouth?

MCCARTHY: I do believe if you have a 24-hour clock the human beings we just separated from the chimps and the apes at 23 hours and 58 minutes.

Q: Got it.

MCCARTHY: 98 percent of our DNA is just exactly what chimps DNA is.

Q: 98 percent.

MCCARTHY: Yes and that's why we have fingers like chimps so we can hang on to the tree limbs.

Q: When I broke my thumb the surgeon said, "Only two percent of the genes separate you from the chimps. In your case, Dan Whitman, I see no difference at all."

MCCARTHY: There you are.

Q: He convinced me that I can't have surgery on my thumb. It's supposed to be opposable.

MCCARTHY: Oh, is that right?

Q: Have you met Bill Bryson by any chance?

MCCARTHY: I know the name.

Q: A Short History of Nearly Everything which talks about and the only thing I've ever read that gives a sense of what a billion years really is; or a million years.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, that's right.

Q: He puts in metaphors and actually examines this very thing of the vast amount of time that precedes us and the timeliness of where we are. It's commonplace...

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah, it's overwhelming when you think about it.

Q: ...but even trying to imagine it is not easy. I don't want to torture you and I know we've got some marvelous material but I don't want to give up the opportunity to just recapitulate the chronology. If there is anything to add since 1997 your honorary degree and you've now taught in every educational institution, secondary and tertiary, in this area and many others. Is there any other biographical point that we should bring out here?

MCCARTHY: I've been very lucky with my family life Dan, and my wife and I have been married for...how many years have you been married?

Q: I was married for six years.

MCCARTHY: Oh six years?

Q: But I would have to start the clock again at this point in time.

MCCARTHY: Oh yeah, are you going to remarry you think?

Q: At age 68?

MCCARTHY: It could happen again.

Q: Anyway I have beautiful friends including the woman whom I was once married to who is now my best friend.

MCCARTHY: Oh is that right.

Q: The devotion mutually is very very great so I don't see a need to start again.

MCCARTHY: That's fine.

Q: But you were going to say 40 some years.

MCCARTHY: Yeah, 48 years. We met in 1966 and it was one of those beatific moments for us I think. We both were struck with each other and we married five weeks later against all the wishes of our family and friends. Don't do it, you don't even know each other.

Q: Well family almost always gives you wrong advice for most things.

MCCARTHY: Yep, yep, yep.

Q: You have three children, is that right?

MCCARTHY: Yeah, three boys who are all doing fine, they are all involved and two are baseball coaches. One played professional baseball and the other one played divisional baseball and they have year round baseball camps.

Q: We must remember and we could easily forget the very important role of sports in your life and in your academic life.

MCCARTHY: I turned pro in college in golf and then I've written a golf book and I keep up with the game; it's a very family life-time sport. I never played football. I think football is the worst of all the sports.

Q: Well the brain injuries.

MCCARTHY: It's a violent sport.

Q: Apparently the brain is very badly affected.

MCCARTHY: And you could argue it's also a racist game. If you look at the National Football League most of those players are African-Americans, there are very few Ivy League NFL football players. They may own the team but they are not out to get banged up.

Q: I think I understand what you are saying but tell me how this is racist they get fine salaries.

MCCARTHY: Well for a few years, they are exploited and then a new crop comes along, from the farm teams and I don't know the exact percentage but the majority of players are African-Americans. And no matter what the money is, they are being exploited.

Q: The money is short-lived.

MCCARTHY: They are short-lived plus high injury rates and the colleges are just feeder programs to them.

* * *

Q: Here is our third section for today and I think this may be our wrap up. Colleges are feeders. We are sitting here at American University. Need to have your comments about the direction that you would wish for the future of this university or any other. Is American university living up to your expectations?

MCCARTHY: I'm credited with teaching the first peace class here in 1984 or '83 I think. So the program has expanded and we now have a graduate program, a doctoral program and so that's a good example of, I think, what a university can do. I think a lot of credit goes to Professor Abdul Aziz Said who is the longest serving professor for nearly over 55 years I think.

Q: Wow.

MCCARTHY: But he brought in a lot of donations particularly from Arab countries.

Q: This is SIS (School of International Service)?

MCCARTHY: Yeah, and so he got peace part of it. I was the IPCR, International Program on Conflict Resolution. So AU has done well I think, and they've had some presidents who were really misfits; remember Benjamin Ladner?

Q: Yes, of course, I remember the name.

MCCARTHY: He was here but was so self absorbed with perks. He had a French chef and the one before him was Richard Berendzen who was a sex offender and made obscene phone calls to women so he had to be removed. That comes and goes but I think AU has always had a bit of a complex; they weren't quite what Georgetown was and so they are trying to overcome that, I think.

Q: You've taught at both universities.

MCCARTHY: Yeah.

Q: Is there any reason for a complex?

MCCARTHY: Well Georgetown gets a lot more students from prep schools, they get the Andovers and the Choates and the Exeter's; you don't find many of those at AU. Whether that is a negative or a positive that's hard to verify but I do know and I'm going to go back and teach in the fall at Georgetown; I've been at the Law School for 27-28 years. But the undergrads I get a lot more students from wealthy backgrounds at Georgetown than you do here at AU.

Q: I guess that is not a value judgment but...

MCCARTHY: Well, no, you take people where they come from, sure.

Q: Any comments in terms of conflict resolution? The three programs that are known that have reputations are SIS, George Mason and U.S. Institute of Peace, which does not give degrees. If you were coaching a person...

MCCARTHY: One problem is too many are tied into the traditional national security issues. We have to have a military, we have to defend our country and so it's pretty much the safest establishment way of thinking. Like the Brookings Institution is looked on as liberal they are not really liberal they are at best Centrists.

Q: I'm thinking of at least two senior members of Brookings who often abdicate in their Op Ed for military intervention.

MCCARTHY: Oh sure. Who are they O'Hanlon and....

Q: But I don't guess that Brookings ever said that it was in favor of peace, did they?

MCCARTHY: Oh no, you know it's just compared with AEI, American Enterprise Institute, they are on the right and Brookings are on the left so that's how the media separates the apples and oranges.

Q: It's a little bit simplistic isn't it?

MCCARTHY: Oh yes, absolutely, but even the U.S. Institute for Peace there are very few pacifists on that board; Joe Eldridge is now on the board of USIP.

Q: I know, I know. He was instrumental in picking the new director, I think. He was on the board that was called in to get a permanent director.

MCCARTHY: But I think they have a room down there that I think is the Frank Carlucci Room or something like that.

Q: NSC.

MCCARTHY: Or some garish...but George Shultz has a room named after him; oh my God it's yucky.

Q: One of the very prominent presidential candidates is hiring advisors and George Shultz is one of them. Another quote in The Post this morning by James Baker saying, "Well endorsing Jeb Bush I very much admired his father." There is something missing in that sentence, isn't there.

MCCARTHY: Oh sure, oh sure, it's just depressing when you think of it; but anyway...

Q: We cannot end on a depressing note and again I don't want to force you. I'm so grateful for the stories you've told. I know there are many missing ones and the missing ones are totally my fault.

MCCARTHY: Oh no, that's nice Daniel, and you're very gracious.

Q: Colman, give us an expression of a feature that could be better.

MCCARTHY: Well my chips are all riding on peace education as against the old establishment way of dealing with basic conflicts whether at home with your families I mean there are so many types of violence Dan. There are so many kinds of violence --military, racial, sexual, gender, homophobic violence, animal rights violence that's an issue we didn't really get into the animal rights issue. But I always ask my class and maybe I mentioned this before but how many of you want to reduce cruelty in the world? All hands go up. How many want to reduce world hunger? All hands go up. How many of you want to reduce global warming? All hands go up. How many of you want to have a healthy body? All hands go up. Okay, does anybody see the point I'm trying to make here? Stop eating meat and stop exploiting animals with your clothing or anything else, you can do that. You can't lower the Pentagon budget or this afternoon you can't stop the

death penalty this after but you can stop killing those animals. That's an issue that I try to get across and sometimes kids pick up on it. But eating meat, the cruelty is so out of sight that we don't see how those animals are raised or how they are killed or tortured. Animals do get their revenge; we eat them and get heart disease from them.

Q: And mad cow disease.

MCCARTHY: Mad cow plus salmonella and it just astonishes me how this culture, the whole world, kills and eats animals and we call it meat. It's really chemicalized animal body parts, flesh. What are we having for dinner? I never hear the phrase flesh and potatoes.

Q: Although the German word is fleisch, meat.

MCCARTHY: Right.

Q: For the record I'm with you on this and have been since 1969.

MCCARTHY: Oh is that right? Nice, good for you Dan.

Q: If you've ever visited slaughter houses most people who visit them stop eating the next day. That's why slaughter houses no longer welcome visits. Now this may seem like a tangent but I don't think it is to everything that has preceded in this conversation. The other species on the planet may be one of the many unique messages in this interview is to spend a moment considering other species.

MCCARTHY: Well that's the golden rule to do unto others but what does others mean just we upright two-legged primates? Or does it include all human beings? I think it includes all. Even then nobody is pure in this game. This building is habitat destruction. We took this land away from the animals and never think about it but a diet is something. Students often pick up on it, particularly high school students, because at that age they are distancing themselves and either you have negative distancing or you have positive distancing. So sometimes the negative is drugs, you know, just self-destructive distancing but a lot of kids will go home and say, "No more meat for me, mom and dad, but the rest of you barbarians keep eating them." So the rest of us take the high moral ground plus insulting their parents; which they love to do. So you get a real twofer with that.

Q: I don't want to manipulate this conversation but may I see in what you just said some signs of hope for the future?

MCCARTHY: Well I think given information this is what's happening that's what schools are about. Some have become degree factories, these big state 50 thousand student schools and some of those small schools like this one but all we are dealing with is information and people pay us to hand it out so that's an act of faith that it means something. But I do tell them you can act on the animal rights issue, you can do that; just think what you are doing. You are reducing cruelty, reducing hunger because 80 percent

of the food in this country -- at least corn and oats -- goes to feed animals. It's a high waste of water plus the pollution; the runoff. I mean this is overwhelming that this problem is rarely talked about politically. Michele Obama always makes it clear when she talks about healthy foods, "Oh our family we're not vegetarians," always, never missed it.

Q: Never noticed.

MCCARTHY: In other words she's afraid of being ridiculed though she knows this issue I'm sure she does. So they are afraid of being oh my God we got a couple of vegetarians in the White House, argh. *Fox News*, wait till they get a hold of that one.

Q: On this jocular note let us conclude. Let me just say I think, again this is not a tangent I believe that this is just a fundamental part of who you are and what you are determined to do. I share that, by the way. I want to thank you for a remarkable conversation.

MCCARTHY: Oh you're good Dan thanks for including me.

Q: Thanks.

MCCARTHY: Thanks for including me.

End of interview