Interview with Harold Schneidman

May 3, 1976

The first question has to do with my formal educational background and training and my answer would have to be that it was both unorthodox and eclectic. It involved attendance at such diverse institutions as the University of Pennsylvania for public administration in state and local government at the Fels Institute and the Charles Morris High School for journalism and advertising and at what is now I think called the Delaware Valley College, which in those days emphasized agriculture and where I studied and practiced general agriculture. In later years I did work in international affairs and attended both Harvard University and Cornell University for area studies and language training. In terms of practical training, all of my professional activity seems to have been in this one field of public relations publicity, dealing with the media, and with community activity.

The second question is what were my job positions before I became associated with the Greater Philadelphia Movement. I guess this ties in with my answer to the first question. They had to do with publicity for motion pictures and theater and then in World War II I was a member of the Coast Guard and was a combat correspondent and had an opportunity to travel very widely through the United States and to see most of the major cities and even some of the middle-sized smaller cities and get some sense of what was going on there. During that period I covered every state in the country.

After getting out of the service I was a partner in what I think was Philadelphia's first public relations firm which was called Biddle, Earl, and Schneidman. This was an opportunity to work for some of the civic organizations and community organizations in the city. I think we were successful professionally but not a great success from the financial standpoint. At that point I went on to another newer firm that was being a little more successful fiscally, run by the former editor of the Philadelphia Record, Harry Nathan. He, likewise, was dealing in community and civic activities and one of my colleagues there -- an excellent chap named Hugh Sutherland, who had been an editorial writer for the Record and before that for the Ledger, left to join the Greater Philadelphia Movement. A year later he decided to go into the foreign service and asked if I was interested in applying for his position at the Greater Philadelphia Movement and that's what led me to it. I came there, as I recall, about 1950.
(WMP: What sort of work did you do there?)

I was -- Buck Sawyer was the Executive Director -- I was his overall assistant. I had major responsibility in the field of public relations, meetings, report preparation and design, and the whole communications package.

(WMP: How long did you stay?)

I was at GPM during the whole charter period and up until you agreed to take me along in your baggage to City Hall. So it would be 2 1/2 years.

The third question -- how did I happen to become associated with GPM -- I've already answered.

Fourth -- describe my concept of public relations and basic philosophy as to how public relations can properly be used by municipal government. My concept I guess is fairly hard to articulate. It would have to be a combination of providing information and either channeling such information and events to allow the audience you are attempting to reach to identify with the subject institution you are representing. The challenge, of course, in government, whether it is municipal, state, or federal, is to attempt to change most people's approach by involving them in governmental challenges, opportunities, and options to transform the "they" into "we". To make them part of the decision-making and mutual identification, and I think that at no level of governmental or any other activity is this more important and more possible than in municipal government.

The next question is -- did I have anything to do with the action of the City Charter Commission in 1951 in establishing the office of City Representative either by suggestion as to members of the Charter Commission directly or feeding the concept to them through the Greater Philadelphia Movement with which I was employed? The answer is a little fuzzy. I can recall conversations, both officially and unofficially on behalf of the staff of the Greater Philadelphia Movement with individual members of the Charter Commission. I also recall being one of or maybe the drafter -- I can't recall that -- of the resolution to the charter commission on behalf of the Philadelphia Public Relations Association which was the trade group in the field at that time calling on the charter commission to include such a function in the new charter. I guess it's pretty hard for anyone who wasn't involved then to realize just what a profound thing the city was going through. I don't want to attempt to say that it was as profound as the drafters of the Constitution -- the U.S. Constitution -- but in a way I think we were trying to come up with a road map for a great and useful future for the community. I think the members of the Charter Commission and those of us on the fringes of that activity were as serious and impressed with the opportunity as the drafters of our Constitution and Bill of Rights were.
Now you come here to a very difficult question — you ask if you were correct in recalling that I came to you after Joe Clark had announced that he was appointing you to the position of City Representative and Director of Commerce and that then propounded a philosophy which fit into your way of thinking. Did you not then ask me to prepare a plan of organization for a Bureau within the City Representative's office dealing with publicity and public relations for the entire city — a bureau which would service every department and agency in the city?

I would say that is absolutely correct. That is the way it did happen and I think that not only I -- but I think all of the people with whom I was in contact -- either public relations people or other staff people in civic organizations were delighted with this development -- both that there was going to be an office of City Representative and that you were the man who was going to found it -- create the institution in your image, so to speak.

You then ask if I recall how the first year budget of the Bureau of Public Information was initially formulated and the money provided by the 1951 city council dominated as it was by the old Republican regime — and there I run into intense fuzziness. I do not really recall. It seems to me that you had a pot of money and I don't really remember where it came from and that it was our getting started money, so to speak, and it provided the framework in which we operated the first year.

(WMP: Since you don't remember -- I think I can fill in a little bit. You recall Frank Short, who was in some job in City Council. He did public relations, in effect, as well as being a super advisor. I don't remember what his title was -- budget director, I guess. And he did public relations on the side. Well he, I think, saw to it that money was appropriated for the City Representative's office. He envisaged himself as becoming the City Representative. We did take him in, too, because he knew a lot about City Council and we had to have some sort of a bridge to the past.)

He was a most unusual and memorable man. The next question is to tell how the Division of Public Information of the City Representative's office was set up and staffed and to recount the major programs I instituted, such as the Mayor's Report to the People on television and radio.

I would have to say that the way it was set up and staffed was partly theoretical and partly happenstance and, whether or not it was good public administration, it was an attempt to utilize the talent we were able to attract and I think we were very fortunate because the team that you and I were
able to put together. It was an extremely talented and even more important a highly motivated group as I've worked with, and looking back I would say that if you had your option between great experience and less experience but higher motivation I would pick the latter, and I think we did. I think we had people who were not the most experienced in the world, but they were almost universally highly motivated. I remember Bill Mensing (m) and Wayne Barry (m) and we had Don Mattern (m), who was very good with radio and TV, and we had a young lady whose title was secretary but really did everything, Marion Wambold. She was outstanding and on the radio and television program she played a major role. There were others that I don't mean to leave out who were very good.

The major programs that we instituted I think came off of this. The new city charter and a different party in power presented all the media with a kind of mixed bag of presumptions about the future. They didn't know what it was going to be like. I think they wanted to work with us but yet they weren't sure they could trust people who were operating in a critical context. So I think that they were willing to give us openings at the same time there were strings attached and we had to show that what we were going to do was essentially public service and not partisan promotional activities. And I think in those days we pretty well were able to get cooperation for any reasonable thing we sought and with your leadership and support and that of Mayor Clark we were able to do all of these things in a public service and non partisan way. And we had a whole series of basic programs which eventually were the City Hall reports where the Mayor did it once a month and then other officials of the city government took turns and these were carried at different times by all the city's radio stations. We had special reports by the Mayor on television on different channels on different subjects and sometimes a general report and then of course we had the most popular of all of our programs which were the Tell it to the Mayor -- which had an element of show business in it or showmanship, because any citizen could come to the Mayor or member of the cabinet and present their complaints. And then there were a whole bunch of things that really the originated an attempt to survey and make the people acquainted with the various services and activities in city government. In terms of radio and television that was essentially a we had.

(WMP: This is the first time any municipality had done anything like it --)

Oh, I think so.
One city — Louisville, Kentucky — had one program which was on before us — a kind of a rap session. As a matter of fact I think they called it something like that and to my knowledge that was the only regular broadcast that involved the Mayor.

(WMP: What was this you were going to say about Mr. Rizzo being used on the air?)

Thinking back over the 25 years, one of the things that was absolutely unplanned but nonetheless a direct result of all this activity was the emergence of a police officer named Frank Rizzo who was one of thousands and I would say had nothing especially to commend. As a major public figure through these television programs -- we were doing a very interesting program with a station that was then called KYW television with a very dynamic young director named Cal Jones. And the station manager named Roland Took. He was very supportive of this idea. We were doing some very dramatic programs on some of the more dramatic aspects of the city government. Mental health, crime, prisons, rehabilitation, this sort of thing. And we wanted to actually show the police in action and for the first time have a television crew riding shotgun, if you will, with a police cruiser and actually participating in arrests and chases and the like. And they wanted a police officer who looked the role of what they thought a police officer should look like. Frank Rizzo, at that point I think was Sergeant and he looked like a young, tall, handsome police officer. He was very well groomed. And he was then assigned to 12th and Pine station, which of course was nearest to City Hall and the focus of much of the gambling and vice activity and it was assumed that the more publicizeable police activity would come in that district. So Frank was picked as the star of the series and he played the role very well. People who followed his career believe that that started it. He very quickly moved to Commander at 12th and Pine, became Inspector — and all this happened in relatively few years after his public exposure. The next thing I knew — I read where he was the Police Commissioner. And now he's Mayor. There's no question that he had a city-wide reputation as a result of the television programs.

You then ask how we won the confidence of the media -- both the press, the radio, and the television stations -- I touched on that a little bit earlier. Here is where your leadership and that of Joe Clark was so important. There's no question in my mind that when I talked with the people who ran the radio stations, television stations, newspapers, and magazines in Philadelphia — at the very beginning of course we were off with a tremendous aura of hope. The change in the new charter and new administration and party and we had very attractive people. You will recall that the administration
went to great lengths to recruit the outstanding professionals in almost every field throughout this country. We brought a recreation man from California and a health man from Denver and all sorts of people from everywhere and this had a negative political kick-back -- we were referred to as carpet-baggers. I was caught because I lived right on City Line, but on the wrong side of the street. I had to move. This was a very attractive and very easily promotable administration. But I must say that in all these discussions when we tried to negotiate programs and publications there was a very obvious vein of skepticism -- that after all, we were from City Hall, that we were political animals, and in due course our true colors would show. But I think that you and the Mayor understood this even better than I and knew that if you wanted to maintain this kind of momentum and do this job properly that it would have to be done substantively and not at all politically. And it was only later that I think there emerged a quotation that I still hear -- about how there is no partisan way to collect garbage -- there is only a good way and a bad way. And that in fact in the long run that there is great partisan advantage from approaching this in a non-partisan way. And I think that is essentially what we did. Everything that was done during that period was absolutely substantive and factual and while all of us were prejudiced, it had to do with position. We were taking on some city program, not to try and prove that the party of which the administration came was the best party and the other one was not. The fact that so many of the leaders of our Democratic administration had originally been Republican I think was part of it because it showed a commitment to progress and service rather than to party label. So that the confidence was not there in the beginning, but grew increasingly as a result of the performance of the leadership of the administration. In other words, we had a very good product to sell. I guess one of the basic rules in public relations is that you cannot whitewash a manure pile because it is too porous. So you've got to have a good product.

The next question is to state how we completely changed the character of the city's annual report and arranged for it to be printed and distributed by the publishers of the city newspapers. This is I think a very good approach to the same question. Frank Short, as we mentioned earlier, used to produce the city's annual report and it was typical of every kind of governmental report. It was fulsome -- comprehensive, boring, and absolutely never read. Who would read the average government report? As the administration gathered steam and committed itself to engaging the people of the city into the government -- making it we rather than they -- clearly the annual report had to changed from this bulky non-read material into something that was brief and pertinent, addressing itself to the real concerns of the citizens and widely disseminated. And what better way to
do this than through the two great newspapers that went into every household in the city. And the newspapers to our amazement not only agreed to it but welcomed it because it was for them a remarkable bit of evidence about the important institutional role of the newspaper. And as I recall in the beginning at least it didn't cost us anything. We had to pay for production costs -- the type and plates, but not for any of the printing or distribution.

The other question is -- do I recall whether we had difficulties in enforcing the departments to use our bureau of public information in dealing with the media on matters of immediate concern to them and would I tell how I worked it out to obtain the full cooperation of the cabinet members and all the commissioners who headed the departments of the city? That is sort of a dirty question in several ways, but I guess we have no alternative but to face it. At the very beginning -- and institutionally we were in trouble, because Philadelphia had what just about every other American city had, which was a fairly substantial amount of money and a fairly substantial number of bodies squirreled away in all of the various city departments and agencies under jobs called administrative assistant or information assistant or public relations assistant or special assistant and the function of that money and of those people was to promote a particular commissioner involved. They had no concern really with the Mayor or with the City Council or with the city government or with the people as a whole -- their job was to make the commissioner they worked for look good and presumably groom him as a possible candidate for Mayor at some future point. What you had set out to do with your office was to change all this and to change the thrust of everything that was being done in the field of public relations and community relations and have one single client and that client was to be the city. And this did not come about very easily.

Now how did we go about it? We went about it on several levels. As we moved into the first budget process under the Clark administration, a very definite effort was made to ferret out these people and ferret out these funds and take them away from the individual departments and agencies. And I think that you very effectively but politely and gracefully used the tool of the city charter which clearly placed in your position this function and I think that Buck Sawyer, who was your very willing colleague in that, saw where if the public services provided were good and if the attempt at involving the people and community as a whole in the city government succeeded there would be credit enough for all and if we failed there would be blame enough for all. So we all could hang together and do this thing the way the charter set out by putting it in your office. And I think that with a few false starts -- little by little everyone did come in. We ought to say from the standpoint
of freedom of the press that this centralization of function and responsibility at no point ever kept a media representative from having access to the individual commissioners. You were not saying that no one could talk to the press or the media.

(WMP: Let me add that you were the one who was advising me on this.)

That's very kind of you, but essentially I think we all felt that we wanted to run an open administration. I remember Mayor Clark's line -- that you probably wrote -- when he was inaugurated and he talked about the administration was going to live in a gold fish bowl. That lived on in history -- the gold-fish bowl administration.

(WMP: To be historically accurate, I think Joe Clark himself wrote that.)

I think we took it seriously, and it was that way. And at no point were they (the press) cut off. What we're talking about are the things that the administration of the city had created. The initiation came from your office.

(WMP: Under your direction. I think it ought to be noted that you had the confidence of the Managing Director, Buck Sawyer.)

We worked together. It's very hard -- I see this even now in international diplomatic activity -- it is very hard for anyone, no matter how intelligent and able, who has had little experience in communication to fully trust the communications media or the practitioners of the various in dealing with the communications media. Some of the most experienced ambassadors and diplomats are terrified -- some of the most experienced politicians are terrified -- and they look on people in the media and communications field as enemies and traps to be avoided. I think that if any one thing comes out of our period together, we looked on communications and the media as an enormous opportunity to achieve one of our best goals.

In Buck's case, my point was that Buck having seen how dealing with the media and communications had furthered the objectives of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, I think was one of the easier members of the administration for you and me to deal with.

Here comes one of the most difficult questions of all -- would I describe the steps that I took -- the work we all took together -- to change the self-image of Philadelphia
citizens and overcome the shabby reputation which Philadelphia has earned for itself throughout the United States and many parts of the world. That's a pretty hard question to answer. I would say, in retrospect, that we had one very great advantage -- Philadelphia had been I think unfairly largely, pilloried for so long that its image was so low that we really had almost no where to go but up. I think that we mutually made one very profound and correct decision which was that we were going to avoid the temptation to go Madison Ave. In other words, we did not set out to blow our own horns in terms of the national media or through advertising and say -- hey, look, here's a new Philadelphia -- come see it -- we're not the old Philadelphia of the old jokes. I think in what has got to be one of the best decisions I've ever seen taken -- this determination to start very slowly and very substantively and attempt to reach almost every single Philadelphian and involve them in our experiment -- in our experience -- in our great undertaking to turn Philadelphia around. The young people and the old people and the people in every section, the people who had wealth and the people who didn't. To have everyone feel that it was their city and they had something to say. Turn them -- and I think this was the key to all of it -- turn them into volunteer members of the City Representative's office. Every Philadelphian came alive to his or her chance to play a role in, participate in, contribute to the brighter future for the city. And in due course -- it was really only a matter of months -- plus, I think the performance of a very capable and effective and motivated administration gave them reason to base it on. In a matter of a few months the morale shifted in the city, so that as we were able to move slowly but increasingly faster and use one national media exposure to help bring forth another, we had something that stood up under examination. Frankly, it was very easy after a while. But I think these were the basic parts of it.

It's interesting because after I left the City I was retained by what is now called the National League of Cities and several cities individually that were attempting to emulate what had happened in Philadelphia and in each case my job was to convince them not to do what we had succeeded in not doing -- the first reaction is always to go on a great media binge of advertising and say the old image is wrong, here is the new image. And it won't work even then we were at the edge of what is now very much an era of communications. People moved around -- they were in touch with each other by phone and letter and you could not project an image successfully that was not shared by the people who live there. In other words that was the basis of it all. And the Philadelphians had to believe in themselves and believe in their city and believe in the city's future. And then the new image was very easy to project because it had a basis in fact and a basis in belief.
Another one of my favorite questions, and difficult, has to do with asking me to speak on any subjects which I would care to see made part of this record and that took place in my area in the Clark administration. For example, I remember -- you remembering -- that I had something to do with the annual festival of the city at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and you recall a banquet at which nationally prominent Philadelphians received awards. Would I comment on the philosophy of that undertaking and describe some of the events?

This and one other that I would mention came I think in the second half of that term -- the Clark administration -- when we did have momentum and when we were starting to believe in ourselves and when we were starting to have an increasingly better image and acceptance both at home and nationally. When people started to look at us and see many things we became more conscious of the great assets of our city that we had taken for granted and I think no Philadelphian can be anything but very proud of the great cultural institutions of the city which clearly were one of the reasons for having been the nation's capital and the focal point for the nation's creation, if you will. And those cultural institutions have remained -- they've been supported by the people and by the city government and they have prospered and played a role in our city's development and growth. They've played a role in our national and international lives. They are a source of riches and a source of heritage for all the people and just as, for example, the arts are terribly important to the development of each of us individually I now have learned the hard way that they are equally important, if not even more so, in bringing about understanding between peoples -- peoples in the same city, peoples in different cities, peoples of different backgrounds, cultures, and religions, and they are a kind of a language. And Philadelphia is blessed with a profusion of these institutions. We had taken them for granted. They were assets at the world level which we had been proud of in our own quiet way and had not really shared.

The idea of a Festival of the Arts, which came I think in 1954, was really aimed at this and you and the Mayor were particularly interested in this. And I must say, and this is probably improper and I shouldn't say it, it was the only city program that to my personal knowledge the then Mrs. Clark ever got excited about and led to my being called at home on weekends by the Mayor, which he did not usually do, certainly to me -- but he was obviously being put up to it. I think that was one of the most spectacular events I've ever participated in and I don't know how well you recall it, but I have been living around the world and I had been with kings and great royal pomp and circumstance and

Presidents, dictators and...
I had never been to any more spectacular event than that first Philadelphia Festival of the Arts. If you will recall, here is this magnificent institution, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with its great classical architecture and with its collection almost unparalleled anywhere in the world and beautifully installed and which was largely being ignored by the people -- it had been sort of a private club. And it had recently gotten several spectacular new acquisitions -- the Arensberg collection, one of the great collections of contemporary art and Pre-Columbian art. We had the Johnson collection installed. We had the regular permanent collection. But it lacked people. And we were putting together the arts -- we had a mummer's band playing in the Arensberg collection. We had a jazz band playing somewhere else. We had a string quartet playing in another part of the museum. And on this grand staircase, which is one of the most impressive things ever seen, were the cream of Philadelphia's political and cultural leadership and the director had gotten Sturgis Ingersoll to chair it and he gave himself unstintingly to this thing. And Bonnie Winterstein and all these people who were at the head of cultural life in Philadelphia. It was done magnificently. And there was a dinner and then on the grand staircase in front of thousands of Philadelphians -- in fact one of the great traffic jams of all times -- the President awarded certificates and medals to these great people -- Eugene Ormandy, Marion Anderson, Grace Kelly, the great architect that did the PSFS building, George Howe, Edna Phillips, the harpist -- I can't remember all of them, but we had about ten of the most super people in the world for having contributed to the edification, entertainment, and development of people through culture and I just can't imagine how it could have been better. And I sort of felt guilty because I felt we had overdone it. This obviously was an institution that was going to continue. And if we had picked all the best people for the first time, who would be left for the future. Franklin Watkins was another one -- the painter. I understand that art festival sputtered after a while, but it is now back in business. It's on a somewhat different character. But that was an evening I'll never forget.

(WMP: You had the concept of turning the Art Museum into an Acropolis, which it really was like.)

Exactly. It was copied from. And I remember when we first came back from overseas we had a temporary apartment on the Parkway and we had had a seven-year-old son at that point and a relative came and said to him, "Steve, don't you think it's very nice to live so near the Art Museum." And he looked at her and said, "Haven't you ever seen the original of that building?" He had just been to the Acropolis.
Next question -- did we not invite to Philadelphia in the latter part of the Clark administration a variety of media people for the purpose of acquainting them with the rejuvenated city which had been brought into being in such a short time?

We certainly did and I think we did it with pride and a certain amount of self-confidence. This was the period when all of the sort of basic things that had been done to acquaint the people with the government, to involve them with it, when the physical renewal and the cultural renewal and the business renewal, the renewal of the University of Pennsylvania, all these things were happening. Some of them may have had no direct connection with each other, but certainly the climate for growth, the climate for risk-taking, the climate for investment making, all these things came together. And each fit on the other. And we had a story which we were very proud to offer and I notice that certain of the national magazines of that period -- Collier's and Look (both now defunct) -- sent in teams of writers who were essentially exposé people they used to go into situations -- political, governmental, industrial, that from their point of view were corrupt or sensational -- and they sent those people in. And I do think we had our fingers crossed at some points that they weren't going to run true-to-form, but in each case they reversed themselves and said, "No, the real story here is progress." And the first inkling we saw in the media where these chaps tried to make us a model for national activity and of course we were picked as one of the ten cities when the awards were given out -- All America Cities. And we started to see mention being made for the first time of leaders of our administration viable candidates for national office.

You say here that you have undoubtedly failed to bring up many of the methods and events which were so instrumental in helping Philadelphians to achieve a better image of pride in their city. I think one of the really great things that you did and I helped you do was setting up another part of your office which was called for in the charter. And that was the Mayor's office for information and complaints. Now the fact that it was the Mayor's office was crucial. You will recall that we had in the most centrally located, easily accessible part of City Hall this office where every citizen could in person or by telephone was assured of absolutely confidential non-retribution source of complaint-making. Or to accuse a city employee or official of malfeasance or whatever. The very same thought that was in
Tell it to the Mayor. Our instinct was, and it was proven in our statistics, that most complaints about municipal services, most complaints about honesty, and most complaints about all the things that happened between people and their government really are not complaints but are in fact an absence of information. And I think, as I recall, that 98% of the complaints that were handled, both on our television programs and in that office really were not complaints at all. They did not know the law or the regulations -- they didn't know who was responsible for the initial paving of the street or fixing of the driveway or how many times garbage was collected or when water bills came out or this sort of thing. And given the very bad history of municipal services it was an absolutely acceptable notion for most of the citizens to be angry. Something did not live up to their expectations. And we took the position that of course we would give them the information and this would take away their anger and it did -- almost without fail. I think this is one of the great things that you did and I was happy to be part of.

Now, you remember me making a great promotion out of the opening of the new International Airport Terminal Building and although you can't remember what year it was you recall that I had so well publicized it that people came from all directions and in such numbers that highways were completely clogged and not only were the terminal buildings filled with people but also the ramps. Would I say that that event was one of the turning points in the morale of the Philadelphia citizens? I would. And I think that we mutually made a decision to go all out on the airport, both because of the time and because in many ways it was the first physical evidence of the renewal. A lot of what was happening in Philadelphia was under construction. The whole Penn Center thing was going and making a first start on the removal of Dock St. and the fruit produce center. And here with the airport was our first completion. And I think we decided to make it into a happening and I think we did use all the accepted and a few unaccepted techniques of turning it into that. Free rides to people who would come out, events, ribbon cutting, parties, and every possible thing. And in a way the airport, given its sort of entry into the aerospace age, was an announcement that Philadelphia was jumping from the 19th century to the latter half of the 20th.

(WMP: May I interject something that I didn't think to put into the questions -- do you recall how the ceremony when the Chinese Wall was taken down?)

I can't remember. I remember being there. But I think you did that. The night before the last train pulled out and
they had a band playing on the observation car and the
next morning Joe Clark came in and he had it set up with
the television people and so on and he knocked the first
brick off the old Broad St. station building.)

The last question is when and why did I leave my position
with the city and how have I been applying my -- you say
great talent, I'd say limited talent -- for the highest
possible level of good public relations? I was in a way
a victim of our own high-mindedness. Under your direction
and leadership and support of Mayor Clark we had had a
kind of unequalled opportunity to practice government
relations with people in a way that had never before been
achieved and I don't think has been achieved since -- I don't
know. With almost total purity. This may sound naive and
simplistic but there was no attempt to really gild the lilly,
to twist our activity for personal or partisan advantage.
It was just a superlative experience. And the Mayor, in
keeping with the charter, declared his candidacy for the
United States Senate. Something happened. We were entering
into a period of intense political activity on the part of
both parties -- intra-party, inter-party, alike, and it
was clear within a week that what all of us who were involved
with this activity were facing was six or nine months of
quiescence being on the shelf. None of the dynamic things
that we had done would be possible because they would have
to enter into willy-nilly a partisan context and we could
not subject our partners in community organizations, our
partners in communications organizations to this kind of
danger and this kind of difficulty.

(WMP: Are you sure that Joe didn't hold off his announcement
for the Senate until after he resigned? After his term as
Mayor had expired?)

Quite sure. Did he not decide he was not going to run for
Mayor again?

(WMP: He made that decision, but I don't think he announced
it until after ...)

When he decided not to run that sort of kicked off this
campaign climate. There would be a race for the Mayor.
There is no question that he was so personally popular
then that he ran for reelection, he would have just
walked into it. He might not even have an opponent.
Certainly not on the Democratic side.

(WMP: Dick Dilworth had had some unfortunate episodes
when he was District Attorney and Joe was Mayor. And
there were some questions as to whether he would carry
on in the same kind of good government that Joe did.
Actually, he did come through and was a good man.)
But the point was there was no knowing then and we did face this period of six or more months when we could not operate the way we had.

(WMP: At what point did you leave the city?)

What had happened was one of the other great events that culminated from all this activity was when Philadelphia played host to the convention of all the Mayors. All the mayors in the United States came to Philadelphia and this was a tribute to the administration. They had to have an annual meeting anyway, and they picked Philadelphia to see for themselves that this new approach to municipal government that they had been reading and hearing about and Mayor Clark was an active member of the organization and I think would have been president of it if he had stayed in office. So this was an honor to him and an honor to the city and they came and again a very spectacular event in the art museum on the grand staircase was this banquet given for all the mayors. They were so delighted -- it was the best meeting they ever had and then we all went off -- you and I and Sydney Dexter and Quig Newton -- to Puerto Rico and to the Virgin Islands. Then as is their custom, we all went off to the Inter-American Conference of Mayors which was in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The American Municipal Association was so delighted with the results of their experience in Philadelphia and were interested in what we had been doing. They asked me to come with them as a consultant and to try to share through them some of the experiences and some of the results that we obtained and learned about with the other cities. And I did that and represented a few cities individually or consulted with them and was happily doing that during the period when the campaign was going on in Philadelphia, when I was approached by some senior officials at the U.S. Information Agency. The Information Agency was then a new split-off from the Department of State. Secretary Dulles did not like having the information and cultural part of the State Department, which he felt was subject to criticism from some of the more conservative members of Congress under his wing and he sponsored the splitting off of that part of the State Department into a separate agency called the U.S. Information Agency. This had no impact on the overseas infrastructure and the people in the field were to remain part of the Embassy and a part of the State Department network. At any rate, at that point we were still very much in the cold war and the big debate was the choice the people of the world had between Communism and Democracy and after a number of years of attempting to deal with this option on a theoretical and rhetorical level, I think that the people who were running the information agency at that point were very frustrated because both sides of the cold war were using the same words. The Soviet leadership claimed to be the truly democratic people and we were saying we were the democratic people. They were the Communists. And I think most of the world was confused
as to what Communism was and what democracy was and some bright people in the U.S. Information Agency said we've got to get away from the use of labels and the thing that sets our approach to Democracy apart is essentially municipal government, where we organize ourselves to make our own decisions, and the citizens participate in those decisions, and then those citizens tax themselves, organize themselves, punish themselves, or whatever, to carry out the decision that they've made. And that's what democracy really is from the American point of view. And here is this guy who has been going around, working with others, and trying to get the people to do it and understand it. So we ought to get him. And they got me. And this is a little ironic -- remember, this was 1956. I was very proud and very optimistic. I was also very young and I just thought that this country's future was unlimited and cloudless, we had no problems, and all the wonderful things that happened could happen in a place like Philadelphia that had such awful problems 10 years earlier. If all this could happen in Philadelphia it could happen anywhere. The whole future was smooth sailing for everybody in America, except the one cloud on my horizon was this terrible cold war and the future of nuclear war and all this sort of thing and that all of the gains and all the wealth and all the progress here at home would be nothing if we did not have increased international understanding and therefore a decrease in tension. So that anyone who was concerned about his and his fellow citizens future, the real challenge was in the international arena and this was at least the way I rationalized it and they wanted me.

Two things happened. I must tell you how unperceptive I am. Number one, in typical bureaucratic fashion, my first assignment was to a society, which I don't want to name, in which there was absolutely zero ability of any citizen to do anything and where -- this was then a country of 20 million, it is now a country of almost 40 million -- any citizen who had a hole in the street in front of his house and was willing to invest sweat equity and only needed one dollar's worth of asphalt to do it had to go to the President of the country in person. He handed him the one dollar. There was absolutely nothing allowable under their laws, constitution, tradition, or culture that allows any participation anybody in anything. And this was the society in which I was sent off to talk about participatory democracy.

(WMP: What country was that?)

Well I didn't want to name it but it was the Republic of the Phillipines. Which now is under martial law and if you wanted to participate they would be put in jail for it. I shouldn't say that either.
However, that's one part -- I did other things. I started to do more cultural stuff and worked with education.

The other thing, how 25 years later, is that the same -- I can remain fairly optimistic about the future -- I had a complete swing of the pendulum in where before I believed we had to do something in the international arena to guarantee our own future. Now I believe that our ability to contribute to international progress, international understanding, really stems almost totally from our well-being here. It is the functioning of our system. It is the well-being and I don't just mean material well-being; I mean spiritual, cultural, educational, every other kind of well-being. It is the soundness of our institutions; it is the motivation of our society from which not only our own, but I think a good bit of the world's future must come. So that in many ways, and I don't know whether this is a part of the syndrome of the grass always looks greener in your neighbor's yard, but in the 20 or 25 years that I have been away from Philadelphia and where the great majority of this time has been spent living outside of this country and trying to put myself deeply into other societies with entirely different backgrounds than I'm, both Asia and Europe, and in the last five years since I've been back here in Washington and travelling a great deal all over the world, I see not a lost chance, but I would hope that people would have taken on and perfected what we started 25 years ago in Philadelphia. I have a feeling that individuals and collectively one of the greatest contributions we could have made to mankind -- to our people -- would have been more and better of the Philadelphia experiment of the early '50s.

(WMP: You overlook a little bit, though, Hal, our own racial problems in this country -- the Black ghettos in our big cities -- )

I'm glad you raised that, Walter. I must say that one of the great shocks of my life was the explosion in Philadelphia. I had been preaching as I went around the world and people raised the question that injustice, lack of progress, could only be eased, improved by leadership and that what we had to have in all communities, not only in America, but elsewhere, -- especially where a community was ethnically or racially diverse -- was leadership in all parts of the community. And I kept on saying that the city from which I sprang -- Philadelphia -- was outstanding because of the tradition in Philadelphia we were fortunate to have -- certainly in the Quaker tradition to have excellent leadership in the majority part of the establishment and we also had excellent leaders in the Black community and it was a given in those days that while there was increasing friction and trouble in many communities, it
was not true in Philadelphia. And then with the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. When city after city across the United States blew up and then it suddenly happened in Philadelphia. It seemed to give a lie to everything I had believed and had been saying. But I still feel that there is the potential for leadership in all the elements of Philadelphia and I know that there is reason to not agree with that from time to time, but I still think that in the basic resources of the community that there is the potential for great leadership and that this can be worked out.

(WMP: Have you observed Philadelphia from a distance since the Clark administration? Do you want to comment on the Dilworth and Tate administrations?)

It's very hard for me to comment because it seems to me that after our period, and again, I want to say that this is not claiming great victories for us, but we were there at the right time with the right thing and we had a great deal of national and international attention, so I guess we were there when it happened and had all the fruits. The people who followed I think didn't have -- had a decreasing availability of attention. So that as I moved around the world I heard less and less about it. I really couldn't fairly characterize it. It was my impression that despite some concerns Mayor Dilworth did end up being one of the truly great Mayors. And then I think what we saw, and I guess this is unfair, I talked about this at the very beginning, if in the administration which we both came in City Hall there was any one fatal weakness or error it was not realizing that despite our non-partisan approach, government is part of a political structure and I would say and I guess this is one of the great rules of public administration that the professional politicians don't take reformers seriously because they have no staying power. So if I may paraphrase what they are supposed to say, do not worry about those do-gooders, they are transitory. And if once every 20 years or every 50 years, or in Philadelphia's case every 89 years they are able to put it all together and win, just be patient and in a couple of years they go away and then we'll be right back in power. And I would say that in retrospect our political leadership in the administration did not consolidate its basic political leadership within its party.

(WMP: What do you remember of City Council when you were in City Hall? Of Jim Tate and other leaders in Council?)

I remember considerable personal but not political discussion with him. Jim Finnegan, who was the President of City Council, was a remarkable man and was so recognized by Adlai Stevenson who made him his campaign manager, -- I learned from Jim Finnegan early on the need to have one public image and another privately and privately he was the easiest person to deal with that I ever met. But publicly he had this
role of having to be mean and nasty and anti-the civil service and the bureaucrat, the career person. He would give us a very bad time in Council hearings and privately give us anything and more we wanted -- whether it was support or money or participation in our program. Jim Tate, on the other hand, was very easy publicly and less so privately. And gave me the impression of a man who lacked any great confidence. The great crack about him always was that his whole being in politics stemmed from his role in carrying Jack Kelly's gym shoes when he played on the basketball team. I think that's true, too. That's the way he got into office.

(WMP: Anything else you'd like to add to this record?)

The only other thing is my disappointment and mystery as to why you, who I think have never gotten 1% of the credit you deserve for initiating not only Philadelphia's mid-century political and cultural and physical renaissance, but many other things of an institutional nature -- in the field of public housing, and the field of social justice, the field of -- you almost name it, if it's good, Walter Phillips was not only there but probably gave birth to the interest in the function. Why you never sort of pulled all this together and produced in Philadelphia what Cincinnati had for so many years -- in the late '40's and early '50's -- a kind of bi-partisan, non-partisan good government league that would have foiled the interests and the plan of the people who participate in government and stay in politics only for profit. I have the feeling that you had the ability, the insight, you could inspire people, and why somehow you were not head of a movement that put all of this together. It seemed to me that this weakness that I talked about earlier -- the fact that Mayor Clark had not established over his own political party when he could have. He had the whole thing. And when Mayor Dilworth came it was probably already too late. The professionals had made their arrangements -- they had worked it out, and we never got it back. The one real hope was you -- you had the staying power --

(WMP: Off the top of my head, I can't really give you an adequate answer on that, but there were several factors -- one was that even when Joe was Mayor the politics was moving away from reform. I was junior to Clark and Dilworth, both in age and in experience and -- )

But you were much more experienced than either of them. You had the whole city planning background, the whole citizens movement background, and neither of them had any where near the insight into the mechanics of our community and our government that you did.
(WMP: Well, maybe I had too much involvement with the mechanics of the Bureau of Municipal Research, city planning, and so on -- I was more of a technician than either of them.)

But you operated on a policy basis -- you were a member of GPM and you were in all these things.

(WMP: Happenstance, partly, and partly personality -- I think Clark and Dilworth were more established in the community than I was -- Dick was the head of his own law firm, Joe Clark was a partner -- a founding partner -- of what is now one of the biggest firms in Philadelphia. They were more established than I was. And they had both been off in the war and had come back with great records. I was around in Philadelphia all the time -- the military wouldn't take me because I had had rheumatic fever -- and I grubbed around with the civic activity so much that I was not politically in tune. I didn't have the political approach to subject matter. I would try to dig down deep and get other people involved. I thought it would be more successful to encourage a whole lot of other leadership people to get in. A person who puts himself out front cannot influence things many times as much as somebody that is behind the scenes putting things together.)

I think that's true. And certainly in your City Representative function and that part of it that I handled for you, there was always this conflict -- is the City Representative someone who is out front? And presumably in latter years that has become the role. Or is the City Representative the one who organizes the other people to be out front and to do these things?

(WMP: That problem was faced by the Charter Commission -- at first they were going to have a Grover Whalen -- then somebody on the Commission said that that would lead to a superficial sort of individual and he really hasn't got the stature to welcome these distinguished visitors and so they would want somebody who would at least be in the Mayor's cabinet. So they put together the concept of the City Representative for public relations and the Commerce promotion and then they threw in the airport because that involved commerce and the port facilities. And that suited me -- I was very happy with the position I had in City Hall and I would have stayed on but Dick Dilworth and I had our differences, largely because I was instrumental in drafting Clark to be Mayor in 1951 when the law partners and the wife of Dick Dilworth wanted Dick to run. That was a situation that was very difficult to resolve.)
Who was his key law partner in political terms — the one that was pushing —

(WMP: It was Harry Kalish and Ann Dilworth, his wife. It was really Joe's turn to run but Dick had sacrificed so much that — in the early days when it was tough-going in 1947 that they thought it was only just that he should have it.)

One of the great untold stories -- I don't remember the details -- had to do with the casual, but at least to Buck Sawyer's point of view, important relationship he had with Ann Dilworth. They came from the same area of Michigan and both of them came from small-town Michigan and ended up in Philadelphia, which at that time was the hardest place for any outsider to crack -- certainly a small-town person from Michigan.

Walter, there is one point I would like to raise, hopefully at some point in the future some young person who wants to improve his own community will read or listen to this. Looking back, one of the lessons I would like to share with such a person and I hope you agree with this -- is the degree of pragmatism and realism that was in this period of reform when people like you who were at the very forefront of the reform movement were faced with idealism vs. pragmatism. In other words, do you set up -- as most young people are inclined to do -- a line down the middle of the street or between people and say these are the good guys and these are the bad guys and we are with the good guys and therefore the bad guys are enemies. They are not to be looked at, spoken to, or dealt with. They are beyond contempt and therefore they are written out of the covenant and we only deal with the good guys.

I think -- and here I need your corroboration or disagreement -- that one of the stories of Philadelphia was during the period of the charter commission when certain people on the charter commission truly either were members of the bad guys group or certainly were their spokesmen. Certain people there, both private citizens and government officials came from the old machine and benefitted directly in very great ways from the old machine and the old system being in power. And it was only, in my view, that you reformers were able to deal effectively with some of these people and get them to go along with the reforms that were in the charter.

(WMP: Well, GPM was pretty good at that.)

I mean individuals too, as well as GPM. But you could have written them off, is my point. You could have said -- for example -- Bob McCracken, legal counsel for the Republican City Committee, and in many ways benefitted from the cozy relationship with the old organization. Most young people would say that that is consorting with the devil -- you can't talk to him. Fred Garman, the President of City Council,
was very much a partner in the old machine. And then he became one of the agents for change. My point is that if you deal with people pragmatically --

(WMP: Fred Garman was a man who, when he was in City Council -- not the President of Council -- introduced the city planning ordinance, which was really the beginning of the reform.)

My point is that in this effort one must keep in rein all temptation to be emotional and label things and people and you have to sort of keep your eye on the main and if your objective is to turn a situation around -- to bring about reform or bring about progress -- you must deal wherever you can, however you can, and you just can't everything black or white. It has to be -- we will do anything reasonable to advance the objective. And you proved it. You did it.

(WMP: Let me go back to Cincinnati -- a city which has held a high standard for a long period of time. There is a smaller city and that Taft family was very strong there -- Charlie Taft, not so much Robert Taft -- they managed to get a city manager and proportional representation along with the manager plan and they formed a non-partisan party, so to speak -- it's a party that was not connected with the Democrats or the Republicans and that endured. No other city has been able to imitate successfully --)

No. But the result is bi-partisan in that for many years, for example, while the majority of members of City Council, elected by this non-partisan group are in fact members nationally of the Republican party, they voted year after year after year for Frank Cash, who was a nominal Democrat to be the Mayor. He died in an accident. The only time in my life I've ever been in espionage or an under-cover agent was the time that you and GPM sent me to Cincinnati and my mission, although it was never explained to me in the beginning, was to try and influence our city charter commission that year then meeting to adopt the proportional representation scheme and the city manager scheme. And what I did was to go to each key leader that I could get to in Cincinnati -- and I got to them all -- and say, "Do you really believe in the city manager form? Do you really believe in proportional representation?" And they all did. They were committed to it. And I said, "You're name is Roger Farger, you're the publisher of the Cincinnati Enquirer. Would you please write a letter to Mr. Robert McClean and Mr. Walter Annenberg of the Philadelphia Bulletin and Philadelphia Inquirer and say that you as a publisher know that they, as publishers, are considering this thing and I want to share with you our experience and I highly recommend the city manager-proportional representation program."
I went to Charles Taft and said, "Would you please write to our officials?" I went to the religious leaders. I went to the President of the University of Cincinnati and asked him to write to the University of Pennsylvania. And it was working beautifully until both Mr. Annenberg and Mr. McClean published in their newspapers the letters from Roger Furger and then the scheme was exposed. The thing that really killed us was that I had been so successful in my undercover activity that you will remember that certain members of the Charter Commission got a special railroad car through Bob McCracken and they went to Cincinnati for several days and they talked to everybody and they were very enthusiastic. The last witness was Charles Taft, who was the head of City Council and the brain and the heart and the soul of the non-partisan good government movement. The Philadelphians were all convinced of and the question I guess Mr. McCracken put to was, "Now we've heard all these good things and I think we are prepared to recommend it. What is your view?" Charles Taft said, "I recommend against it. This is so important to us -- the city manager, the proportional representation -- is so important to us. We have had a failure in Cleveland and we cannot afford another failure in another large city and when all is said and done you in Philadelphia just do not have an adequate political tradition to support this kind of government, so I urge you not to do it." That just knocked the whole thing out.

Again, had our leadership at the beginning, when the two parties were just (2), established general leadership or whatever, I think we might have, in due course, built the kind of political tradition that Mr. Taft was talking about.

(WMP: Our city is so much bigger, for one thing. And the parties exist there because they are national and state parties as well. It would have been pretty hard to create a city party in a city the size of Philadelphia because to fund it, to get people to work for it, and so on -- we have a tradition in Philadelphia of civic agencies, which would do research and which would advocate one thing or another that ought to be done in the city, piece by piece, but we never had the strength to change the political parties. We could get a new city charter. There were precedents for that. There was a new city charter in 1919. I'm glad we didn't try the Cincinnati plan. I don't think we would have succeeded.)

One factor that made it different, in thinking back, was that the ethnic mix in Philadelphia is so diverse whereas in Cincinnati there is one sort of over-riding ethnic group and maybe there is a cohesion there that Philadelphia cannot have. There are so many different groups in Philadelphia
that no one really dominates. I guess that's fair to say. And you've got to sort of reach a happy mix with them all. Whereas in Cincinnati it was easier — just having essentially the German group.

(WMP: It wasn't only Philadelphia that didn't follow Cincinnati. Cleveland tried and failed and as far as I know no big city ever followed it. We came nearest to doing it with the Managing Director and we got a smaller City Council with some of them elected at large for the first time.)

Do I understand the city has gotten away from the tradition of appointing a professional city manager and now putting political people in as Managing Director?

(WMP: Yes, that's what Rizzo is doing.)

And Tina has now resigned?

(WMP: Yes, Tina was moved out of the Managing Director's office and went to Philadelphia General Hospital and is still there —)

She has resigned. I saw a newspaper clipping in the last week. I understand she has been the subject of a very nasty press campaign over the terrible situation at PGH and they are using her picture a lot and she gets a lot of spill-off. It reminds me of the terrible battle we had with PGH when we first got into the thing of the medical schools —

I think Tina has an insight into this that is unique because she was a bridge between Buck Sawyer's stewardship at the Bureau of Municipal Research and Len Moak's taking over.

Walter, do you see the linkage between what happened when you were such a central character in the reform and renaissance in the mid-'50's and Philadelphia today and the near future?

(WMP: I think there is a continuity in civic work. The GPM has now merged — it sort of lost its drive and leadership. They never had much staff. But the board fell apart because they didn't have the right people on the Board to cope with the issues so that GPM was fading out. And they had a Black man, I've forgotten his name, who was sort of their errand boy — they called him the Executive Director, but he wasn't anything very helpful to them. But another group of bank presidents who were not on GPM — Fred Heldring, President of Philadelphia National Bank, Jim Bodine, President of First Pennsylvania Company, formed a group and tried to focus on center city problems. And this younger crowd
got together a pocket of money -- very much like GPM but I don't think there were more than 9 or 10 at the most on this new thing called the Philadelphia Partnership and that got going and after about a year or so, they absorbed GPM and they had Graham Finney as Executive Director. He was a very able fellow. He came from New York. He was in charge of the drug addiction problems in New York. They had ties to Philadelphia of some sort. Dick Dilworth was Chairman of the Board of Education they hired Graham Finney to come over and work on the Board of Education and work out better systems and so on. That ceased to function when Dick left and that was about the time that this new group was coming into being, so then Graham Finney became executive of the Partnership. It's a re-constitution of GPM. I think it's going to operate more or less as GPM did. But it's younger and more dynamic.)

Was Bill Rafsky a director of GPM for a while?

(WMP: Yes. They fumbled around. Then came the Bicentennial matter and he moved more into that.)

It's interesting on a personal note -- there were four people who I think saw a lot of each other at that time who were sort of internal anonymous colleagues and they saw each other socially a great deal. One was Bill Rafsky and the other two chaps sort of were there and preceeded him as he moved in different jobs. One was Harold Enarson and the other was Paul Ylvisaker. Now I am in touch more with the latter two than I am with Bill Rafsky -- I lived next door to him for a while when we were both in City Hall -- and it's funny how the three of us have really done things outside of Philadelphia that are closely related. Hal Enarson is now President of Ohio State University. And Paul Ylvisaker, who is at Harvard is now going to Europe for us, so we are in touch this way -- professionally. Bill is the only one who stayed in Philadelphia.

(WMP: I want to interview Paul Ylvisaker.)