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BBC HISTORY ARCHIVE: Ludovic Kennedy

Interviewed by John Caine

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THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC insert:

John Cain interviewing Ludovic Kennedy

JUNE 18 1986

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IDENTIFICATION

Reel I

...An interview, John Cain with Ludovic Kennedy for the BBC ORAL HISTORY. 18 June 1986.

CAIN: Could you tell me a little bit about your early history before you started broadcasting, with particular emphasis on anything that might have had some interest in broadcasting later?

KENNEDY: Yes, I always wanted both to write and to broadcast from as far back as I can remember, and indeed I was very thrilled in the middle of the War - I joined the.. after I'd been in destroyers one or two other jobs for about three or four years, I joined the Admiralty Press Division with Tony Kimmings and John Moore and Nicholas Montserrat and various people, and I was terribly excited when Paul Richie's brother - he'd wrote a book called FIGHTER PILOT, ~~and I did a book called YOUTH AT WAR which was~~... and I did a book called SUBLIEUTENANT and Anthony Irwin did a book called INFANTRY OFFICER - they were all put together and made into a book called YOUTH AT WAR and actually it's the biggest best seller I've ever had because nobody had much else to read in the War. And anyway, while I was at the Press Division Paul Richie's brother who was a navigator, I can't remember his name now but something else Richie. Michael Richie, Mike Richie, was going to read a talk on the BBC but he couldn't do it because he really didn't have a voice at all, and they asked me to do it and I was terribly, terribly excited - this was the first broadcast I'd ever done. And of course, I expected, you know, shoals of congratulations and things to come in after it was over. I

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think it was lunchtime on some programme. Well, nothing happened, but anyway that was a start and it er.. the experience was everything I'd hoped it would be and I felt the adrenalin going and all that. And then really nothing very much happened after that. I was er.. demobilised in due course and went back to Oxford, but I still wanted to make a career in broadcasting as well as my own writing and I applied whenever I could, and whenever I saw advertisements. And my last year at Oxford there was an advertisement to be something to do with television, a man called.. who's now called Lord Orr-Ewing I remember interviewed me and we had to do various things. We had to write - we saw a tiny bit of film and we had to write a commentary to it and then deliver it. And various things like that. Well I went in for that; I didn't succeed. There was also an advertisement for BBC announcer or Newsreader, I can't remember which - I think Newsreader, or Continuity - something of that nature, and I went in for that and sort of sapped up on my German and French to get the pronounciation right, and I didn't... I didn't succeed in that either. And then I got in in a rather curious way. I had been continuing with my writing. I had been doing a certain amount of work for the SUNDAY TIMES. They rang me out of the blue one day as a result of this book I'd done in the War, called.. called SUBLIEUTENANT and then also I did a book on Nelson's Captains, which came out round about this time. And the SPECTATOR had asked me to do a few articles and so had the SUNDAY TIMES. And at this time, just before ITV came into being, there were no readymade presenters or interviewers or anybody because the BBC had whatever monopoly there was. So they had to fish around at the ITV for other people, and so they naturally orientated.. they orientated either towards actors, people like um.. oh I've forgotten the

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man's name - Derek Bond and people of that nature; Macdonald Hobley, people of that nature. Or they went to journalists and I was one of the journalists and the first I knew about anything was an invitation from ATV to take part in a thing called SUNDAY AFTERNOON and there was a little item called PROFILE and PROFILE was to consist of this: that I was to ask three guests in who were each in the space of a minute to describe a fourth guest, and the audience had to guess who they were talking about. And then I said to them, "Well ~~who:~~. have you guessed ~~got~~ who it is?" And they said, "Yes," or "No," and they had the guesses and then eventually on came whoever it was they were talking about. It might have been Peter May the cricketer or Bob Boothby the politician or Randolph Churchill or whoever, and then I interviewed him for about a minute or two minutes, and that was the end of that. Well, then what happened after that was I'd got a taste for television by this time and was terribly sad when that six months' run, I think it was from the autumn of '55 to the spring of '66 came to an end...

CAIN: '56, '55 to '56.

KENNEDY: Um.. that's right, '55 to '56 came to an end. And was wondering what.. so then I wrote to the ITN and I said, "Did they have any vacancies there?" And they wrote back a nice letter and said, "Well, we do hold auditions from time to time and we're holding one in.. whenever it is and please come." So I went and I did my audition and they said, as they always do on these occasions, "Well, thanks very much and if we want to get in touch with you we will. Goodbye." And away I went. And the next day they rang up and they said, "Robin Day who was doing the News tonight is.. has to go to Edinburgh and Chris Chataway,

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who's the other one, has got the 'flu. Can you come in and read the News tonight?" And I said, "Yes, of course I will." In I went and read the News that night and for the next two years. And so that was my start in television.

CAIN: Yeah. Had you had any previous experience in radio?

KENNEDY: Er.. yes I had. Now I'm sorry I ought to have... I just can't remember when the date... I did a thing on radio ~~for~~ called THIRD READING.

CAIN: Yes, I think it was in 1950.

KENNEDY: Oh it was in 1950, that's right. You're quite right. It was the year I was married. I'd forgotten about that because that was a kind of ~~a~~ a one-off really. I mean I didn't do a regular radio thing although later I did the WORLD AT ONE once or twice, or I think it was called the WORLD AT NOON or the WORLD AT MIDDAY. Anyway, the BB.. this again was because of the SPECTATOR articles and the SUNDAY TIME articles. My name was known a little bit, not much, and they wrote and said, "Would I... " John Davenport was the producer, "Would I come and present a thing called THIRD READING, which was a..." No, what was it called, THIRD READING, what was it....?

CAIN: FIRST READING I think it was.

KENNEDY: That's right I don't know why I said THIRD READING. FIRST READING. "Would I come and present this for six months?" Which was to be an anthology of new poetry and prose. And I was slightly surprised at being asked because I'm not really, I mean although I write I'm not a literary man in the sense that John Daveport's a literary man or Anthony Thwaite or Anthony Burgess or anybody else you like, and it was a slightly surprising choice, but I quite enjoyed it and I quite enjoyed sorting through the

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various poems and p.. prose that came to me. I don't think I did it very well. One.. one critic said that I had all the.. that I delivered in 'the tones of a leaden postmaster' or something like that.

CAIN: Nevertheless you were in the English Festival of Poet... Spoken Poetry two or three years later...

KENNEDY: Oh that's perfectly true, yes I did. Well, I took.. I was very interested... You see, I wasn't very happy with my own voice. I think this was partly a sort of upper middle class background and Eton and Oxford before the War certainly and all that kind of thing, which I was well aware of when I joined the Navy, I mean even ..although I went in as an officer, I was well aware that my voice was a bit plummy and I wanted to correct this and I wanted to be able to speak well and speak so that people would enjoy just... you know the sound of my voice reading whatever it was and so I went and took a lot of lessons. There was a girl called Heather Black from one of the drama schools, I can't remember which one, but she came up to our house in Church Row and gave me many, many lessons. And then as.. as a sort of fulfilment of that I went in many years running in the English Festival of Spoken Poetry up in Regent's Park, and finally I was runner-up the year Gabriel Wolf won it and who now of course does a lot on BBC radio and then I.. the year after that I did... I did win it.

CAIN: Perhaps your wife was an influence in this too?

KENNEDY: Well, no 'cos she wasn't a speaker you see? She was a ballet dancer...

CAIN: She hadn't been acting then?

KENNEDY: No, she hadn't been acting then at all, no, no.

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CAIN: Oh I see.

CAIN: Well now you're in ITN. What happened next?

KENNEDY: Well, I settled into this routine with my colleagues Robin Day and Chris Chataway, and producer James Breed~~a~~in and a fellow called Bob ~~Verell~~ Verrall, they were the two and a wonderful girl who is now a woman called Diana Edwards-Jones who.. very fruity language, but a great character, and we all got down to it. Well, it was fairly amateur in those days, you see Diana Edwards-Jones not only sort of did everything. I mean she cranked the homemade autocue which was done by hand and I think a footpedal I'm not sure. Anyway, she cranked that. She did the make-up. She told you when it... she was the floor manager. She did everything. Or some other girl, but I remember her most. And er.. everything, as you know, was live in those days and it was quite hairy. I mean you know you got the countdown, all the things coming through - "10 seconds to go, 9/8/7..." you know, you're on the air and you were on the air and you were talking to whatever it was, 5/8/10 million people. But it was very, very enjoyable. We did a.. I think I did something like 3 days a week. I did the early ~~morning, the early~~ evening bulletin which was about roughly where it is now and then we'd go off and have dinner and then come back and prepare the.. prepare the material for the late bulletin. And the great thing about ITN under Aidan Crawley, first of all, and then later under Geoffrey Cox, was that Newscasters were allowed to put the bulletins in their own language. That's to say they couldn't take wild liberties, but if you'd got something which had been done by a sub editor which

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didn't come easily for your way of speaking, you could transpose that into a thing that did come easy to you .. your way of speaking. I mean I... and then sometimes one went even further. I remember at the time of Suez, which was a very traumatic time and we had Randolph Churchill into the studio and we had... - it was a very traumatic time. And I remember there was a direction from the Foreign Office saying, "It is requested that the media will not refer to this operation as an invasion but an intervention." And I said to Aidan or Geoffrey, I can't remember which was there then, "I'm sorry, but I'm buggered if I'm going to do this. This is an invasion. Invasion comes from the Latin vado, to go, and in, in. And that's what we're doing, we're going in. We may be intervening as we are going in, but I'm not going to wear that." And he absolutely backed me up and I never heard anything more about it, but it was an absurd sort of situation. But we were served well by our sub editors, amongst whom of course was dear Reginald Bosanquet. And I remember him saying to me one day when we chatting, you know he said, "Was the script alright?" I said, "Fine." I said, "Reggie, you know what do you eventually want to do? Do you want to go on writing scripts?" And there were two or three of us there and he said, "No," He said, "I really want to do what you do; I want to be a Newscaster." And it was met with a hoot of laughter from all round the idea that Reggie who turned out to be probably the most popular Newscaster after the War wanted to be one was hilarious at that time.

CAIN: There's a couple of things I'd like to stop you on there. First of all, Robin Day you mentioned. Was it clear to you and the others around you then that he was going to be a considerable figure in the interviewing of politicians at that time?

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KENNEDY: Yes, not only that he was going to be but he actually was.

CAIN: He already was, already.

KENNEDY: There was the famous interview with the Japanese Foreign Minister, you may recall, when he pulled some ballbearings out of his pocket and said, "I understand that you've promised not to flood the market with these; and these are your ballbearings and why are you flooding the market?" I can't remember the exact situation, but of course you could get that... And there's no doubt about it he was. he was a formidable figure, and I think one could see that if given the right surroundings and sympathy and that kind of thing he would go far. But of course he was up against a a certain amount of opposition because he was out on a limb. I mean I've had my ups and downs with Robin in my life but nothing will ever dissuade me that he hasn't been the most formative influence in political interviewing that there's been, and I don't know how the pattern of interviewing would have gone it hadn't been for him because er.. I mean with the exception of Brian Walden, I can't think of anybody else whose anywhere near him. I mean, Alistair Burnett's absolutely useless. People on PANORAMA are pretty useless. I mean there are one or two quite good people. David Dimbleby I think is very good. I'm sorry I'm getting ahead of myself now.

CAIN: No it's alright, 'cos it links to the other question. Is there any sense in which politicians in those days were a softer option than they are now, or is this just a story that's put about? Has there been any significant difference, change in the way politicians react to people who are interviewing them like you and Day and so on?

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KENNEDY: I think that er.. I mean if you go back a little bit further there's a famous interview which I've seen, you've probably seen once or twice, of Leslie Mitchell interviewing Anthony Eden, and it sort of starts off, "Foreign Secretary, it's tremendously good of you to give a little of your time to me today and I wonder if I might start off by asking you...." whatever it is. I mean it's the sort of lickspittling interview of those days. Robin was the first really to change all that because we didn't do a lot of interviewing on ITN. We did a little bit but not very much, but he was the first. I've always remembered Robin saying one thing, this was years later, but he was always .. he was being asked at a meeting Grace Wyndham-Goldie was having in... the canteen or somewhere at Lime Grove about interviewing. And he said, "When I'm.. when I'm talking to a King I put myself... I try and put myself on an equal with the King; and when I'm talking to a dustman I try and put myself on an equal with the dustman." Voice in the back of the room, "Hear, hear." But he set the pattern there and I think politicians just gradually responded, as all public figures have had to gradually respond over the years to a new way of doing things. And they've come and regarded it as a challenge and a challenge which they feel they can overcome and to a certain degree whoever is being interviewed has an advantage. He can always stop. He can always do what he wants. He always has an advantage, but they also like to feel that they can beat the man. And this is what makes people like Robin so good, because they.. you've got to do your homework, I mean it's useless if you don't do your homework and if you do your homework you'll never have the knowledge the politician has, but you'll have enough information to .. to challenge him, and the thing that one must never forget that what the interviewer

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is doing is not asking questions just for his own sake, he's asking questions on behalf of those who are viewing who would ask those questions if they had the same information as he had.

CAIN: Well, now, while you were at REDIFFUSION I believe you were involved with THIS WEEK. Would you like to say a word or two about that?

KENNEDY: Er yes, er.. yes I would. What happened was that after I'd done the News for two years the Rochdale by-election came up and I was very keen to go and fight it and I did go and fight it and very nearly won it, and then they said, "Well you can't come back to ITN, you've made your political colours too plain and therefore you must do something else." Well, I'd already for sometime had my eye on the Chairmanship of THIS WEEK which is now called ITV EYE, but it's the same programme basically, which was their Thursday night current affairs, half hour current affairs spot. And er.. I can't remember who was doing it at the time. I think it was a man called Westmacott, or Westfield or Westcott, something like that. Anyway, I didn't think much of him, nor did anybody else, and so I put in an application, went to see John McMillan I think it was, or somebody there to see if I could take over. And oddly enough they were looking for a replacement at the time so it all worked very well, and I did... I did THIS WEEK for two years. My producer there was a delightful, a terribly wet drunk called Hunt, Peter Hunt. I liked him awfully but he was quite hopeless. But we coasted along for a bit. It was one of those programmes in which of course there were far

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too many items. You see in those days if you kept an item running for more than about 4 minutes people used to say, "It's too long." So into this half hour they crammed 4/5 sometimes 6 items. So it wasn't terribly satisfactory. But we had some good items. We had Dan Farson doing some very good things. But I mean to show you the idiocy, I mean the big deal when I was there we got permission to go and interview Chancellor Adenauer of Germany. We went over, ~~I think~~ with 35mm. I think the crew was just under 20. The cost must have been phenomenal, and they... Adenauer didn't speak a word of English, I didn't speak a word of German, so we did this lark with translations and Adenauer's replies went on from here to kingdom come and we came back and we couldn't use a single foot. All this could have been discovered before we went. That was typical sort of Peter Hunt THIS WEEK at that time - nobody ever thought anything through. So that was THIS... that was THIS WEEK. And then I also did a thing called ON STAGE, which was a.. was quite fun. I came down the sort of curly staircase, fire escape thing into the studio. That's... that's how I introduced it. And this was a half hour programme which Peter Morley was directing about the theatre, and what was on and who was new and I interviewed some actors and actresses and Michael Bentall who was Director of the Old Vic at the time and an old friend of mine from Eton days. I did a thing on the Old Vic with him. And it was quite a pleasant programme but I don't think it was very important and I don't remember about it.

CAIN: This business of length of items and the control that you had over these sorts of things - I mean was there a feeling that items should be that short the result of any real knowledge or research, or was it some gut feeling that somebody had that you would lose viewers if things went on too long, and did you..

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did some of you try to resist this?

KENNEDY: No, because you see at that time we didn't try and resist it, because at that time nobody had really tried the longer thing, so it wasn't considered even a possibility. I mean it.. later it became .. it became obvious that everything was very trivial. And it was. It was a very trivial programme, basically. I mean more than half of it I would say, looking back, was about trivial items rather than about important ones. We had the occasional important one.

CAIN: REDIFFUSION, later, of course, disappeared, ~~and~~ ~~there~~ was a rather curious set-up with that strange man Captain Brownrigg running it. Did you have any sort of general feelings about the nature of the company compared with some of the other ITV companies or was it something...

KENNEDY: Not really.

CAIN: ...that just... you didn't .. you didn't notice?

KENNEDY: No, you see, I mean if you are contributor and a presenter and a freelancer which I was you're really out of the company thing. And I mean we all knew about Captain Brownrigg and I met him several times but he was .. I mean he was a bit of a joke. The man there who was really impressive and came later was Cyril Bennett and I did do some work from him and admired him very much.

CAIN: Now I think your first major BBC TV job was in PANORAMA 1960. How did that come about?

KENNEDY: That's right. Well, I'd been two years in THIS WEEK, and I was getting more and more dissatisfied with it because

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as I've told you it was a bitty programme and it didn't have.. it didn't have any proper leadership or guidance, there was no feeling that it was going anywhere. And I'd increasingly was admiring PANORAMA on the opposite channel. And I'd met Leonard Miall once or twice, I don't know where but I had met him, and so I asked .. I rang him up and said, "Could I come and see him one day?" I went to see him and I said, "Look, I'm not awfully happy where I am. Any chance of a move to PANORAMA?" And so he said, "Well certainly, see what I can do, I think we'd like to have you." And as a result of that I went over and did join PANORAMA in 1960. I always remember my first story was Burning or Burial, a typical sort of PANORAMA story in which I went round a crematorium and I remember interviewing a stoker down there and he had a cigarette in his mouth and I wondered what he was going to do with it when he'd finished, and he just opened the oven door and... and there was a coffin blazing away inside and he chucked it in. Anyhow that's neither ... So, anyway I was with PANORAMA and that was...

CAIN: As a reporter this is?

KENNEDY: As a reporter.

CAIN: Yes.

KENNEDY: As a reporter both for studio items, for home films and for foreign films, and that was a very exciting time. The first producer I had was Michael Peacock who was a strange man. I mean you'd pass him in the corridor in your.. Monday morning when you're coming in for work and he wouldn't even say, "Good morning..." and it wasn't because he was being rude or anything, it just didn't occur to him. It was... he was a very odd man. He had one great gift, he really did produce one. I only did one story with him because he very rarely went on a.. on a film thing himself, but he did on one occasion, and he was absolutely

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first class and gave one advice. You see no producers in television actually produce in the sense that a theatre producer produces. A theatre producer would say, "Look don't say your lines like that. Say it like this and move over here..."

CAIN: When you say produce you mean on current affairs programmes?

KENNEDY: I mean on current affairs programmes, yes, yes, yes I'm not talking about drama. On current affairs programmes no producer that I've ever met with the one exception of Peacock on this thing actually produces one and says, "You're not saying that in quite the right way. Put an emphasis here." You know what I mean, that sort of thing. And that is the thing that (COUGH) I think could be done more of and could be very valuable but it doesn't occur to people to do it. And then Peacock went and then Paul Fox came in and he was quite different. An extrovert, outgoing man with a lot of good ideas and a bloody good... and a bloody good editor. I mean, you know, you'd work your guts out in the slums of Bombay on some story and you'd go and record it in some olive grove somewhere where you know you're trying to get a bit of silence for the sound man and you'd ship it all back and you thought, well I don't know, I don't know if it's ever going to reach London let alone be developed, let alone be put on. And as soon as he could Paul would send a telegram back saying, you know, "Thanks marvellous stuff running 17 minutes Monday night.." you know all that kind of thing, and that really gave you a zip to go onto the next thing.

CAIN: Now the critics of television, particularly on the left, are always saying that pressure is put of one kind or another to bend things this way or that way, the establishment and so on. Have you, this is the point at which to ask you, have

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you ever experienced that feeling that somehow there is a very strong editorial line and that you can't overstep it or is it more that being in the organisation you come to recognise it yourself and you get what they call, "Self censorship..." or do you feel all this is a lot of nonsense?

KENNEDY: I feel it's all a lot of nonsense, I really do. Let me put it this way, most journalists - I think one's got to recognise this - most journalists are politically left of centre. I mean it's in the nature of the job of a journalist to be critical. I think the Labour Party recognise this more than the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party feel that if you're not actively for them you're against them, and the Labour Party don't feel that. And so er.. you're being, if you... I mean we've seen it in the last few years. Any kind of criticism of the.. of Mrs Thatcher, the Tory Government is.. it's a kind of treachery, but it's not like that and all the journalists I've met have been slightly left of centre, but they'll be as critical of the Tory Government, of the Labour Government as the Tories as the Liberals. Whatever subject you're asked to do I've found from the editor downwards you approach it in a professional journalistic manner, and there's never been in my mind at all any feeling of bias from any editor, from any producer, from any of my colleagues that I can think of.

CAIN: Mmm that's very interesting, thank you. Um.. now after PANORAMA you were doing a lot of other things with the BBC, YOUR VERDICT, YOUR WITNESS and so on.

KENNEDY: Yes. Er.. well, what happened was that PANORAMA finished in 1963. I was.. it didn't finish, some of us broke away and formed a thing called TELEVISION REPORTER'S INTERNATIONAL

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- people like James Mossman, Robert Kee, Malcolm Muggeridge, Francis Williams and one or two producers from PANORAMA and elsewhere. And we had a contract with ATV for a year and we thought that that was sort of us on our own from then on, but of course Lew Grade, we were.. we were a nice novelty for a year but after that he wanted some other novelty, so we all found ourselves out on our ears but it was a very liberating experience because that was the first time - I mean independent companies are now two a penny, but that was the first time there had been an independent company and there was a wonderful heady feeling of freedom.

CAIN: Did it fail because there wasn't a market for it or you were squeezed out or some other reason?

KENNEDY: It failed because the BBC refused to give us a contract. ATV having given us a year didn't want us anymore. But it basically failed because with people like Malcolm around, and Jim Mossman and Robert Kee and to a slight degree myself, we were all slightly 'anarchistic' [in quotes] if you know what I mean.

CAIN: Yes.

KENNEDY: And what we should have done was what Milne and Tony Jay and people did later was to have a solid base of commercial work.

CAIN: As in VIDEO ARTS.

KENNEDY: That's right. You know, for SHELL or ICI or whoever you like, INFORMATION OFFICE, anything to keep the bread and butter going and then done the other things we wanted to do on our own, but I mean that would have bored most of our people.

CAIN: That was a slightly romantic gesture in a way?

KENNEDY: Yeah it was but it was fun, I don't regret it.

CAIN: So you came back from that.

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KENNEDY: So I came back from that, and then ~~I went round~~.. I took a year off, I went round the world to write a book about Americans which er.. which was roughly that time, and then I think the trial of Stephen Ward came into it about that time too. Anyway I then.. we then moved house in '66 up to Scotland and that was an effort to get away and do more writing and I did do a lot of writing. I wrote this book and I wrote quite a lot of other stuff and for my bread and butter I did work with Scottish Television in Edinburgh and Glasgow and a few things for Grampian Television and a regular FACE THE PRESS. We started FACE THE PRESS for Tyne-Tees with Frank Entwhistle, and I was the Chairman of that, and that went on for several years.

CAIN: Is there any significant difference, or do you remember any, working with the small peripheral companies as compared with the big ones or the BBC?

KENNEDY: No, none at all. I mean you get into a studio and then.. well wherever you are you just do the job. I think you have slightly more latitude. I mean I think the producers and editors are rather pleased to have somebody whose been you know in the bigger time shall we say and will perhaps defer to you if you want something whereas down south they might argue it out, anyway I'd still win, but basically it's the same. And then, then Tony Smith who now runs the BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE, he asked me to come down and Chair a thing called YOUR WITNESS, which was a very good idea and it consisted of a kind of a debate on a public issue like... '~~All public education should be~~... Public Schools should be abolished...' that kind of thing. And we had er...

CAIN: It was a trial format, is it?

KENNEDY: A trial format. It was a trial format, and

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I was the Judge or the Moderator, whatever you like, and then we had two speakers for the motion and then three - they had three or four witneses who all came and then the Jury were canvassed on a vote. It's what they do now on the radio and I think they call it the same thing, but it was a successful programme. And..

CAIN: Could I just ask you at that point, what is your view about that format because I've heard arguments for and against it. I mean against it is that it's confrontational and that it has all the.. the dangers of the British Court system, which I know you've been critical of recently, and of Parliament indeed, with one side facing another. On the other hand, it's a dramatic mode. I mean can it be improved or is that a good format do you think for television and discussing important problems?

KENNEDY: I think it's a... Well I think it's a good format for television. I'm dead against the adversary system of British justice, but that's another matter. But the adversary system, the confrontational system is a thing that we're used to in this country. We see it in Parliament. We see it in the Courts of Law and there's no reason why we shouldn't see it in television. And as an entertainment, I don't say that at the end of the day you've learnt an awful lot but as an entertainment it's fine because you get a clash of wits and of wills and people getting tripped up and people getting embarrassed. I mean this is what makes the Courts you know so watchable, because this sort of thing is always going on. But as entertainment I think it was first class. I'm sorry, I'd like to see them bring it back sometime.

CAIN: I think there are probably moves to do that. Do you think you get at the truth this way as well as any other way?

KENNEDY: No, no I don't think you get at the truth, no.

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I mean, no. I think if you want to get at the truth... I mean all I can tell... all I know is about the method of getting to the truth in the inquisitorial system of justice in the continent is a far better.... But the British system of adversaries isn't meant to get at the truth.

CAIN: Well what I suppose I'm saying is is there an inquisitorial method that can be employed in television or is that...?

KENNEDY: Ah well, yes but then you see... Well, now that's interesting you say that because I was going to say well of course you see Robin Day really when he's at it and Brian Walden, what they're really doing is straight cross-examining, isn't it? Ah.. yes I think, it's funny you should say that. I've often thought that what they call the ~~socratic~~ suaviter in modo (PH) the gently does it, is as good a way and in fact it's the kind of interviewing that I prefer to do, as opposed to someone like Robin. I prefer to go in through the backdoor as it were and try and get somebody, put somebody sufficiently at ease to ...to talk and make him feel that he wants to say things and then I would put in a question which would challenge what he was saying, but I would do it in ~~the same as it were~~ a sort of rather quiet way, that Robin wouldn't do, and I think that can be effective.

CAIN: I suppose the criticism against it is that it puts the inquisitor in a very powerful position and he's got to go out of his way to be extremely fair to all aspects of the debate, whereas in a debate it's left to the two protagonists.

KENNEDY: Yes, but it depends what you're trying to do. I mean if you're trying in an interview to get... Well, you see, I think what you're trying to do when you interview somebody is you're trying to challenge the validity of his beliefs. I mean one doesn't interview people about facts, which is boring. You

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interview people about opinions and beliefs. And if you want to test this man's beliefs then I think anyway to do it is fair.

CAIN: Now in the middle 60s, this was the great period of advance in BBC Television and you must have come across some of the great names like Huw Wheldon and Alastair Milne and Ian Trethowan at ITV and Grace Wyndham Goldie. Did they... were they people who struck you as being the coming greats or the present greats?

KENNEDY: It's awfully difficult to forecast who's going to do what eventually and people change direction. Ian Trethowan was with me at ITN and he was political correspondent then. (COUGH) And er.. a delightful chap but I really never thought that he would, you know become Director General. I.. it's difficult to say why but he didn't appear to me to have... to be anything more than extremely competent, good, professional man who was interested in broadcasting. I don't in anyway want to diminish him and I think he made a good job as DG but that's how I felt at the time. Alastair Milne I worked with. I did two programmes with him on the Police, for REDIFFUSION, at a time when er.. we were both freelancing. He'd left the BBC at that time temporarily. And I always admired him as a programme-maker. I admired him as the editor of TONIGHT. But again, I didn't ever think that he would rise to be DG and you know one has reservations about that even now. Babberstock I did work with him a bit once or twice, had an enormous admiration for him. He was a natural. He was a natural. He.. he was absolutely uncompromising in what he said and did. He had the stuff... I think Babberstock had the stuff of greatness in him in a way that Milne never had and it was sad that he sort

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of gradually faded out of the picture in the way that he did.

CAIN: I heard it said about him, and I hasten to add that I didn't know him myself, that he was one of the few men who used insults and rudeness as a positive act of policy, that he could be incredibly abrasive. Is that... is that correct?

KENNEDY: Absolutely... absolutely true, but you see there was no malice in it. That's the point. You can get away with that. You know, I've seen people coming out of the studio in the way that they do, sort of waiting for the editor to say something and they were greeted sometimes with, "That was bloody awful, boy. Bloody awful it was, no other word for it." You know? And er.. you...

CAIN: He was usually right.

KENNEDY: And he was usually right. I mean he .. he was a natural. He was a man, I never actually worked for him, but I was in... you know I used to go into the studio, back into the hospitality room, and saw quite a bit of him and I admired him. I think he had great... great gifts. Grace Wyndham-Goldie was Head of Current Affairs when I went there, and Leonard Miall was the junior. Leonard I've always had a great admiration for - a charming man and very easy to work for and with. Grace I couldn't stand. Everybody said how marvellous this woman is and maybe she was but I found her... I found her abrasive and tough and er.. shrill and totally non-simpatico but that was probably a weakness in me. I mean other people did see things in her. Huw Wheldon was an outstanding figure, always was. I mean with that great manic laugh and wonderful gift of companionship, and he, I always felt, would go far and I agree with whoever it was the other day said that he was the best Director General we never had. I think he would have been superb. I think a lot of our

This is incorrect L.M was the Ho... J.C.

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present troubles might have been avoided if Huw had gone right to the top.

CAIN: What about Attenborough, did you come across him at all?

KENNEDY: I never met Attenborough, no.

CAIN: No, no. Is there something in the theory that part of the BBC's troubles, if indeed it's had troubles and I suppose that's difficult to deny, are partly due to this creation of a generation of people like Grace and Milne and Baverstock and Peacock who almost went out of their way to be journalistically abrasive, or do you think that's too trivial a stance?

KENNEDY: Well, I would separate, I wouldn't put all those names together.

CAIN: I see.

KENNEDY: I mean as far.. you see what I think the trouble is, I think they have appointed to the top in the BBC people who really shouldn't have gone to the top, and this is the trouble I think with the BBC throughout. I mean there's a sort of joke saying that once you get into the BBC they'll never let you go and it's true and you must know it as well as I do. I mean short of, I don't know what, you're there for life and there's a frightful amount of dead wood and it should have been weeded out, and also in the promotion stakes there are people who are not good enough to be at the top. It's when you get people of utterly different characteristics like Reith and Hugh Greene and possibly Jacob - I don't know about Jacob - but I mean when you get people who are outstanding in their own way and will give leadership and a sense of direction the whole thing changes. We haven't had that for a long time.

CAIN: No, right. Well, now you did a short stint on radio I believe, at WORLD AT ONE, before coming back into ITV.

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Is that correct?

KENNEDY: Yes, that's right.

CAIN: Round about '65.

KENNEDY: Yes, I did. With dear Andrew Boyle. Yes, I did that. That, well that was again a straight journalistic job, you know?

CAIN: Did you like radio?

KENNEDY: Yes I did, I liked radio. I liked radio - it doesn't quite set the adrenalin going in the same way as television does, but it's a very comfy medium. I mean as a medium it's a preferable medium because you can talk, I mean like you and I are talking now, in a totally unselfconscious way. You're always slightly conscious of yourself when you're on television, however much you try not to be.

CAIN: Yes. Yes I've heard many people including Robin Day say this and of course at the other end of the thing in an educational thing like the Open University, people will say that if you want to get real ideas across it's radio that you do it with because television - the vision distracts.

KENNEDY: Oh it does.

CAIN: Is there something in that do you think?

KENNEDY: Oh absolutely true, it is absolutely true. You see, I mean, the tiniest thing can distract on television. A man who's got a tie with a curious pattern, you'll be more interested in that tie the whole time he's being interviewed than what he is saying, and if you cut all that off so you just have to use your mind and your imagination it's far easier. I mean you can get ideas across in radio that you can never get over in television.

CAIN: Yes. Yes. Well now you went back to ITV for a stretch from about '67 to '70 with a series of programmes ranging

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from MIDDLE YEARS with ABC and then you worked with some smaller companies.

KENNEDY: Those were the ones I mentioned, Scottish Television, Tyne-Tees and Grampian. Yes.

CAIN: Now the BBC I think you come back too, as far as I can see, in '69 with TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. (YES) That seems to be your next big last stretch.

KENNEDY: That I think was after the end of the YOUR WITNESS..(YES) There were two or three YOUR WITNESS series, yes.

CAIN: So did you notice any big differences coming back to the BBC and how did you find TWENTY-FOUR HOURS?

KENNEDY: Well, TWENTY-FOUR HOURS was a bit different to PANORAMA because it was a late night programme and it was rather a tiring programme because you were there all day, but it was an exciting programme to do and it was a programme with a reputation, and Tony Smith was running it when I went back, Kenneth Alsop was there. I can't remember who the other people were. Austin Mitchell came and joined us I think at one moment, that may have been later. So anyway, I really in my mind can't distinguish between TWENTY-FOUR HOURS and the two similar programmes that followed it. I think was called MIDWEEK.

CAIN: Mmm and NEWSDAY I think.

KENNEDY: And NEWSDAY, but no I'm not sure if NEWSDAY wasn't a thing on BBC-2. (OH) But there was another thing called NEWSNIGHT, no.. not NEWS...

CAIN: TONIGHT???

KENNEDY: TONIGHT, yes, yes TONIGHT, TONIGHT, that's the new TONIGHT. And I did all three and they all just merge into each other in my mind.

CAIN: Yes, they're basically the same format with

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(YES) with slightly different emphases and different names.

KENNEDY: That's it. That's it, exactly...

CAIN: ..in an attempt to keep up with some competitive spirit with the other side.

KENNEDY: That's right, that's it.

CAIN: What was your job on these? I mean you were again an interviewer and a reporter?

KENNEDY: A presenter, a presenter...

CAIN: A presenter.

KENNEDY: Presenter of all of them and presenter of .. well you see MIDWEEK I did the, it was only on Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday, so I was the sole presenter. TWENTY-FOUR HOURS I think there were two or three of us, three or four of us. And er.. I can't remember about TONIGHT. And NEWSDAY was, as far as I can remember, a long interview programme on BBC-2 and I can't remember much about that.

CAIN: Was your role changing at all in the sense that you had a bigger imput to the writing and editorial by this stage, because you were obviously a 'name' by now? Or was there no significant change?

KENNEDY: Well yes... well none really but I mean every programme I've ever done on television I get people to give me drafts of what they want me to say and then I do it in my own words, and whatever.. whatever it's about, I always put it into my own words.

CAIN: And have you have much interference, if I can use that word, or editorialising about your own words or were you given fairly.. a fairly...?

KENNEDY: Just every now and again a wise editor has said, "Look, I think it would be better if you just didn't use that

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phrase here it could be misunderstood..." And I think 99 times out of a 100 I've agreed.

CAIN: But there's no sense in which that is political interference or editorialising or....

KENNEDY: No, no but I mean. No, but having been a member of the Liberal Party pretty well all of my life, one has had to be a little bit more careful than otherwise. I mean it would never have dreamed to me as a professional to try and introduce any sort of aspect of Liberal policy into any programme. On the other hand, we are what we are and if one said something critical perhaps, over critical of some aspect of policy or personality of one of the other two parties it could be seen, depending entirely on the context in which it appeared that I was putting forward unconsciously as it were a Liberal idea. And I've always tried to avoid that and occasionally when I haven't and an editor's said to me, "Look, I think this could be misinterpreted..." and I've said, "Yes, of course."

CAIN: Have you ever been charged by members of the other parties of doing that?

KENNEDY: Certainly not by the Labour Party. I think only by the Tory Party in the sort of blanket view the Tory Party has that everybody in the BBC is a Communist.

CAIN: Yes. Now another thing that interests me which I'd like your view on is this, that you'll be aware that many young producers these days take the view that only committed programmes get to the truth. I mean there are often people on the left who say, "If we want to get the view on nuclear disarmament, for example, we must have CND putting the point of view, and all this bosch about a middle view and being fair and balanced is

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not true." I've always resisted this on the grounds that I believe that a sensible person like yourself or Day can take a neutral view and get at the truth. I mean do you still hold that that is a worthwhile thing to do whilst not necessarily being against committed programmes?

KENNEDY: Er.. yes, I still think it's a worthwhile thing to do. I'm in two minds about that. I have seen some committed programmes which have been extremely interesting and then I've seen them a week later give the opposite point of view and that's been interesting too. I think one does try... You see, a journalist tries unconsciously to keep his pulse on what public opinion is at any one time. I mean there are things a journalist could say today on any particular subject you can think of which he couldn't have said 10/15/20/100 years ago. And there are things which he can't say today that he will be able to say in 10 years from now, and so on. I think you've just got to keep your finger.... I mean one of the interesting things here is this thing with the GLASGOW MEDIA GROUP which are always coming up and saying there's a middle class bias to the News and that kind of thing. Well, it's sort of half true and half isn't true. I mean obviously the News doesn't have a working class bias, but then does anybody, including the working class want it to? And I think the answer is no. And I think that the journalist all the time has got to keep his pulse on what...on what is acceptable and then he can just sometimes go out a little bit from that as it were to test the water. But he can't go too far.

CAIN: So in a sense what you're saying is that the journalist, the good journalist at anyrate, and there are many bad ones of course, his job is to sense what the consensus is

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at any particular time...

KENNEDY: Absolutely, absolutely.

CAIN: Now, your present great success which I personally am an admirer of is DID YOU SEE...? I mean could you tell us how that came about and what your view of it is?

KENNEDY: Yes. It came about because I'd really come to the end of my time in current affairs and what's more the Director of Current Affairs at the time who was John Gau before he moved out obviously thought so too. He really hadn't got any work for me and so I went to see Brian Wenham who'd.. who had always been, who'd looked after me very well while I was in current affairs, and said, "Look, what can I do now?" And he came up with this idea which he said Will Wyatt was doing, which was a programme critical of television during the previous week or so and would I be interested? And I said, "Yes, and I would be interested." And he said... we had lunch, and he said, "What about a title for it?" And I said, "There's only one title." And he said, "What's that?" And I said, "Did you see...? It's the first thing anybody says in the morning when there's been a programme the night before..." And I don't know whether there's a copyright in that or not but I mean there could be a lot of back royalties...

CAIN: A little inspiration that was, yes.

KENNEDY: ...coming my way. And so that's what it was. It started off in a rather sort of populist way with a little girl called Sue Peacock who'd oddly enough she'd volunteered for something, some programme ~~ran~~. train to be a presenter for one day and she'd presented. I don't know what she presented, she

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presented TONIGHT or something for one day, and she came and she did a sort of quiz programme. Well, it started in 1980 and it was very, very dicky then, it really was. It was um.. it was a poor programme. It wasn't a good programme, and then gradually, gradually, gradually we got it better and better.

END REEL I

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IDENTIFICATION... Reel 2.

CAIN/L...Kennedy. Interview for BBC Oral History 18 June 1966.

CAIN: You were talking about DID YOU SEE...? You said you had one other thing you wanted to mention about it.

KENNEDY: Well, from a personal point of view, um.. it to me was an enormously liberating experience, because 25 years, jolly nearly, of current affairs, is 25 years of reacting to events. There's not much latitude, you're responding the whole time to things that happen. But DID YOU SEE....? is like the NEWS OF THE WORLD, I mean all human life is there and you can talk about programmes on sport or programmes about wild life, or current affairs, or drama - whatever you like, I mean the whole thing is open to us. And as you were saying a moment ago, I think one of its successes started under John Archer and latterly under Charles Miller has been the ability of the production team to find new people. We've always tried to get one well-known person, but particularly one well-known person speaking on a subject about which you don't normally expect them to. I mean, that you might get a politician talking about some drama he'd seen because of some tenuous connection, and that is always interesting, to get people talking like that. And then of course everybody has to talk about each subject, so you do get a kind of a.. unexpected contribution of views from people that you wouldn't normally expect to know anything about, or have any views about the subject. And that's been extremely worthwhile. But f.. for me the interesting thing is the top of the programme, because I choose all the clips

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that we have at the top of the programme from the pick of the week, of the 4 or 5 or 6 best things. Now you may think that choosing a clip is quite an easy thing to do. It is an extremely.. unless you've got a flair for it, which frankly I have and some people have and some people don't have, it's not all that easy. You've got a thing which is not over a minute because you get into financial problems if it's much over, which hasn't got probably more than one or two characters in it, because again you have financial problems of giving actors repeat fees, and also you can't ~~take~~ put in a minute's clip more than one or two people. That the scene is self-contained and probably has a beginning, a middle and an end to it. Well when you fulfil all those qualifications you're down to something quite narrow. It's extraordinary to me how many people on the production team who don't know about this, they gradually learn, pick a clip which they think is good and it isn't good because it just... it doesn't make any impact on you.

CAIN: Do you have to see many before you get your clip?

KENNEDY: Yes, quite a lot. Of course, everybody is looking, I mean the whole team is looking.

CAIN: Of course, yes.

KENNEDY: And I used to try and sort of look at home and I sometimes do look at a thing at home if I happen to be in, but I now no longer gear my social life to the DID YOU SEE...? I go in on a Wednesday after lunch and I sit there for 5 or 6, 7 hours, looking at the clips that they've produced for me and other ones which I've seen and that's how we...

CAIN: And then you write your own intro and then you do it the next day do you?

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KENNEDY: And.. and then I do it the following day, and it does seem to work quite well that. I'm always surprised at how popular this programme is. I mean it's the first time in all my life in television that my friends have actually seen me. (LAUGH) Because you see when you're doing current affairs they never, either they don't look at it, or else they... oh you know and it's like looking at the news and they never.. But they come up to me and say, "Gosh that was a good programme last week, and who was that chap who was....?" You know? It's rather nice.

CAIN: Now this business about people who are unknown speaking and being successful, does this prove either that the researchers are extremely good and very diligent or does it perhaps prove that more people can perform satisfactorily on television if they have a good sympathetic interviewer?

KENNEDY: It does...

CAIN: Or does it prove both?

KENNEDY: Well it.. I don't think it's got much to do with the interviewer. I mean every now and again, they do have to experiment and if there's some name we feel... I'll give you an example of where it didn't work. We wanted somebody to talk about some musical production. I think it was... it was COSI FAN TUTTE, and somebody knew Rosalind Plowright, the opera singer, and said that she spoke very well. Well, along she came and the poor dear girl had absolutely nothing to say about anything at all because although you'd think being in opera she'd have a critical mind she didn't have a critical mind and it's having a critical mind that matters.

CAIN: Yes.

KENNEDY: I'll give you one more example of that. We had Sir Adam Thompson, the head of British Caledonian coming to the

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programme, the day before he had to pull out and the subject under discussion for him would have been a drama programme about a pilot after the war who hired a couple of old Dakotas and flew them round on various jobs. So somebody got hold of a man who actually had a little tiny charter company of his own and they thought he'd be alright. He was like Rosalind Pl.. Plowright. I mean I said to him, "What did you think of this programme?" And he said, "Well, I didn't like it." And I said, "Well, why not?" "Well, I don't know, I just didn't like it ~~and you know??~~" And so, you know, it was getting blood out of a stone. But as you say (COUGH) there are a lot of people and the majority, the great majority of people who've never been heard before, talk terribly well. It does mean a bit of research. It means the producer's got to check-up on any other programme they've been on and talk to the producer and find out how they talk and that kind of thing. But there's a great backlog of people... There should be a great list of people who can talk terribly well on...

CAIN: Mmmm When you get somebody like the fellow you were describing who is a washout, I mean do you actually have to scrap it and...?

KENNEDY: No, you can't, you're stuck.

CAIN: You just have to press ahead, yes.

KENNEDY: You're stuck. You.. there's nothing you can do. I mean the producer might say, "Well let's try a retake on that..." and come in and say to the man, "Look have you got something more you can say that you don't like?"

CAIN: Very occasionally one senses, and it is very occasionally, that the chemistry isn't working.

KENNEDY: Yeap.

CAIN: That you're having trouble between people...

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KENNEDY: Interesting thing you should say that because very often we can get three smashing people and the chemistry isn't right and it doesn't come off because they don't respond or react to each other in the way we'd hoped. And another occasion you'll get three people together and you'll think that it isn't going to go at all, and whizz bang it takes off. You can't tell.

CAIN: Yes. Occasionally you can see that one of them hates the guts of the other...

KENNEDY: Yeah that's right.

CAIN: ...and I suppose that presents you with some difficulties.

KENNEDY: Well, it doesn't matter as long as they're uninhibited about it but it's where it inhibits them that you're in trouble.

CAIN: Yes. (LAUGH) Does the programme get much correspondence?

KENNEDY: Er...I get a little bit. I don't know what the producer gets. I get a little bit, not a great deal, I should think 3 or 4 letters a week.

CAIN: And would you say, finally, that this is some proof one way or the other that the public or a significant part of the public is critically interested in television and wants to analyse it?

KENNEDY: Yes it is and not.. not only with things it's seen but things it hasn't seen you see? I mean people like to... people who've missed a programme will very often look at DID YOU SEE...? to see what it was like and what people thought about it. So you've got two audiences there. You've got the one who saw it and those who didn't see it, and in some way it seems to satisfy... The other thing I think it shows is that we are still a sort of... to a certain degree still a sort of family - I mean

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the society of this country is a family. And I don't think however much satellite and cable and what have you will be, I think there will always be a nucleus of people who will want to feel that they're looking at the same things that other people are looking at and having discussion about it afterwards.

CAIN: Yes, yes. It's part of this consensus that we spoke about earlier, the general (INAUD)....

CAIN: You've clearly organised your life so that you write and you broadcast, and you've tended to concentrate on the Navy and legal questions and journeys. I mean has there been any crossfertilization between the two of any significance?

KENNEDY: Between my broadcasting life (YES) and my writing life?

CAIN: Yes, right.

KENNEDY: No, there hasn't really. I did make a film about the Lindbergh case which was er.. a thing I'd also subsequently wrote about, but that's the only one of its kind. There's a certain amount of crossfertilization in fact with the Navy things because it was... it was after doing a.. doing a film about the Bismarck that I then wrote a book about the Bismarck which sold very well. But on the whole that's rare. I've kept the two things apart and I need both in my life, funnily enough. I need the deadline of a television programme and I need the adrenalin and I need working with other people, I also need the solitude and privacy of a.. my desk at home and not being bothered or worried by anybody and being able to shape my material to exactly how I want it and not have to compromise in anyway, which to a certain degree in television and radio you do.

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CAIN: Is there a sense in which the broadcasting work is more suitable for the general public, whereas your more intellectual, introspective, lonely work is for a more concentrated, specialised audience?

KENNEDY: Well, it's certainly not meant to be. Er.. I mean my books are, on the whole... Well, yes, I suppose you're right. The MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE books, they are really for a more specialised public. The Navy books have been meant to be for.. for the general public and oddly enough the one on the ~~Torpits~~ Tirpitz (PH) - which was only a coffee table book - I get more from the public lending right on that than anything else, which is quite extraordinary. 10 RILLINGTON PLACE was quite a success.

CAIN: Yes, what led you to this interest in the law and er...?

KENNEDY: Oh well that's a long story which I don't really think has much place in this.

CAIN: Irrelevant, yes.

KENNEDY: It was really to do with my.. my grandfather whose... was Professor of Law at Edinburgh University and I used to read all his famous, notable British trials and had a very romantic view about the law, and its majesty, its integrity, its immaculacy and all the rest of it, and then when I found after the War that things were not as they always seemed that I, you know, reacted against it.

CAIN: Yes. Well, let us er.. talk about more general questions now. Have you experienced any significant differences working with ITV and BBC?

KENNEDY: None at all as far as the profession is concerned, that's to say as far as the interviewing people in the studio,

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or going out on film, or anything of that kind, except the ITV seem to send more people when you go filming and do things at a slightly grander scale. But otherwise, from the professional point of view I've noticed no difference at all. I slightly prefer the atmosphere of the BBC because it's richer, it's bigger, it's broader. You know people in other departments. You know the Heads of this, that and the other. In ITV you work in a very narrow little group of people and therefore you don't much know what else is happening.

CAIN: Has the experience of working for both of them over 25 years changed significantly? I mean...?

KENNEDY: No, I wouldn't say it has. I mean the techniques have changed. I mean the introduction of colour and then of video and things like that, but they've happened to both of them. But I wouldn't say there was really any difference er.. Programmes have become slightly different in that the idea of giving an hour to one pro.. to one subject or half an hour to one subject is now commonplace, where it was extremely rare in the old days. Um..

CAIN: Is it more frenetic now than it used to be, or less?

KENNEDY: I don't think so. I don't think so.

CAIN: No live programmes now.

KENNEDY: No, there are a few live programmes whereas in the old days they were all live of course and it was very frenetic then 'cos you know you couldn't... anything could happen. But no, it's a certain... when I do DID YOU SEE...? for instance ~~on a~~ in the afternoon, knowing it's not going to be transmitted until the evening, there's always that safeguard in the back of

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your mind that if something awful happens you just start... start again.

CAIN: Do you use autocue?

KENNEDY: Oh always, always yes, always... always use autocue. And er... try and make it sound as if I'm not using autocue.

CAIN: Mmm you certainly don't look at if you're using it.

KENNEDY: No, no, no.

CAIN: There are people who say that autocue is a damnable thing but I always thought that that simply means that they're not using it properly.

KENNEDY: That's right.

CAIN: Are there any er... changes that you've noticed in the administration? I know that you don't have a lot of contact with that, but have you sensed that...?

KENNEDY: Sorry, would you mind I just want to see...(CUTS OFF)

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CAIN: In the years you've been working in television have you noticed any changes in the way that the thing is run, administered? I'm thinking for example of the very much increased size of the BBC and the changes (COUGH) in departments, or does that not impinge on you at all?

KENNEDY: It doesn't impinge on one. You see, people often ask me this kind of question and they often... I mean you know when you meet people at a party or something, "Oh you're in the BBC; do you know my friend John Smith?" And one then

has to explain that there are 25/30 thousand people in the BBC of which one probably knows 50 to 100 if one's lucky! And so one doesn't know John Smith. In the same way, as a presenter, as a freelance presenter who's not on the staff, one just doesn't enter into that kind of thing. One has a dealings with Artists Contracts about one's contract, one has dealings with the producer or editor and then sometimes with the Head of Department, and that's all. That really is all and they're always very friendly dealings, and informal and that kind of thing. So the whole administration side of the BBC is not something with which not only myself but I think any other presenters are much concerned.

CAIN: Good. The other thing I want to ask you is about the.. the media you've worked in, often on similar subjects like Navy subjects or legal subjects - radio, film, television and then print. Do you... do you approach these areas, these media differently when you write about a subject and if so in what way?

KENNEDY: Yes, you obviously do. Um.. I.. I'm someone who will always take on a television or radio programme at short notice if I'm asked but I'm unlikely to take on a .. a written article thing. I mean I do occasionally, but I.. it sort of weighs on me as a chore to be done whereas radio/television is to me always an exciting thing to be welcomed. One of the things also is the fact it's much more immediate. I mean if you go and interview, say for instance, I mean you're asked to go and interview the Home Secretary and he agrees. Well he'll probably give you an hour, ~~I mean it may only be half an hour, he'll probably give you an hour~~ and you'll probably spend the first five minutes sort of talking about the party you met each other at or his golf game or the weather or anything you like, and then you gradually get into the thing and you accumulate, shall we say, for the sake

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of argument, two full notebooks of what he's said (COUGH) and then you go back and then you write your piece and you use perhaps only a third, a quarter, a fifth, a sixth of what you've got down and you distil everything into that. Now when you do a television interview or a radio interview, you've got no opportunity for any of that. The subediting has to be done on the spot. You don't waste time with extraneous questions. You have to go right in and say, "Home Secretary, you know last week you brought in a Bill about something and various people have said this. What do you say to these comments?" You go straight in on the thing and it has to be like that. It can't be done in any other way. I mean you have... you may have a half hour interview with him on television or radio, but it's a half hour which has got to be charged with meaning. The producer may allow you to run over five or ten minutes and take that out, if he's got time, which he may not or editing space which he may not. So they're different things.

CAIN: Mmm How much preparation would you do for one of these lengthy interviews?

KENNEDY: Oh a very great deal. A very great deal. I mean I would get... I would hope to have a good researcher. In fact it would be vital to have a good researcher who could wade through lots of books and newspaper clippings and ring up one or two other people and all the rest of it and then give me a brief and give me the most important clippings to read, not the whole lot but perhaps twenty or thirty and give me a brief and then I would absorb this until I was as well clued up as I would hope to be and then I'd feel confident of going into the interview.

CAIN: So you might do several hours research of one

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kind or other for a one hour interview?

KENNEDY: Oh yes, yes I would. I mean perhaps (COUGH) a full day, a full day beforehand.

CAIN: Mmm Now I think you've also done some production. You have occasionally been a producer of programmes haven't you?

KENNEDY: Yes, I've directed them too...

CAIN: Yes...

KENNEDY: I directed.. when I was with TRI..

CAIN: Do you like doing that?

KENNEDY: Yes, I did. I wouldn't like it now. I mean I think it's a young man's thing, but I did enjoy it. I made a film of which I'm rather proud on a ballerina called Olga ~~Spessivsina~~ Spessitzewa (PH) who created SLEEPING BEAUTY in this country when I was with TRI and I directed it and I wrote it, and I even, because we were short of a cameraman at one time, I even took one or two shots in it. (LAUGH)

CAIN: When you say it's a young man's business is that simply due to the need for a very fast reaction?

KENNEDY: (COUGH) No I don't think it's so much fast reaction, I mean I think it's just a very tiring business and you've got to have a lot more energy than I've got now to dart around, and there are so many things if you're a director... It's not just the question of directing the camera shots, it's all the admin side of it.

CAIN: This has always mystified me a little because whilst I agree with you having been a producer and I don't think I could do it now, nevertheless one has to recognise that this doesn't seem to apply in the theatre and the cinema, and you get quite old fellows - I mean Gielgud still produces and I think he's near his 80s.

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KENNEDY: You're on one spot, the stage or a rehearsal hall. (YES YES) Nowhere else. You've got two.. you've got two locations. One is the rehearsal hall and then you move from there to the stage, but as a producer of a film you're all over the bloody shop - travelling and looking after your crew and seeing that they're alright. I mean there's a hundred different things to do.

CAIN: Yes. Yes. Coming back to politics which you've spent a great deal of your life with in one way or another. There's a lot of criticism, we've mentioned the GLASGOW MEDIA GROUP, but there are plenty of others, there's Whitehouse on the right and so on criticising the whole business of bias and partiality and so on. Do you have any views on that? I mean do you think there's anything in either argument on either side, or do you think that on the whole British television is pretty fair, to use that rather wet word? (LAUGH)

KENNEDY: I think it's pretty fair. I think (COUGH) I think you will always find it difficult to convince politicians of that, um.... Mrs Whitehouse, I'm sorry I'm just going to get rid of this frog. (COUGHING) (YES) I think I've got rid of it. Um... Mrs Whitehouse has obviously touched a chord in some people in the British public, and secondly she's extremely articulate in the printed word, and that's why she's been able to get away with what she has. I think she's basically a bit of a phoney and if you go into her things in depth you'll find that they are shot full of holes. But I do think that bias is pretty minimal. Obviously, everybody has got to have a point of view. I mean you couldn't put a programme on without starting at some.. some point of view and so people do read into that bias, but as I think I said to you earlier, I haven't come across it in my television

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career - at least I haven't come across it deliberately. I suppose there are some people, yes I think there are now I come to think of it, one or two young producers I've met who.. they're more left wing and one or two more right wing than they know they are. So they're not doing anything deliberately, but every now and again you see the way their minds work and yes there have been occasions, now I come to think of it, when a certain thing has been suggested and I've said, "No, that.. that is... that is biased, we mustn't do that."

CAIN: Mmm These are often people who've not been diligent enough I take in.. take it in observing themselves and trying to suppress as a say a good scientist should do (YES) his own prejudices?

KENNEDY: Right. They haven't had a sufficient degree of self awareness. (YES) I think that's what it is. (YES) I don't think it's anything more than that.

CAIN: The BBC, as you know, goes to... I'm sure ITV do as well, a great deal of trouble to get this balance, but it is an interest at the moment that the parties that are complaining most I mean is David Owen and Steel and the Alliance. I mean knowing your point of view and it happens to be mine as well, do you think there is any truth in the argument that the middle ground, because everybody is accusing the BBC of taking it gets under represented? I mean...?

KENNEDY: Yes. I wouldn't have thought so, you can hardly turn on a television programme without seeing David Owen on it or David Steel on it. I mean I was quite unaware that they were complaining that they weren't given sufficient representation. Maybe at a lower level they're not getting.. they're complaining they're not getting sufficient representation, but the two of

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them seem to me to be getting quite as much as one would expect.

CAIN: Well, I take it that it hinges on this question that the BBC tends to do its deployment of politicians on the basis of numbers of MPs, whereas (YES) the... the... the Alliance (YES) takes the view that this is not fair because it's not proportional representation and you ought to do it on the votes cast.

KENNEDY: That's right. You ought to do it on the votes cast and you ought perhaps to do it on the number of Parliamentary candidates at present (YES) awaiting to.. yes I think they... I think this is true and I think on that basis they do perhaps have cause for complaint.

CAIN: But I.. judging from, I think you would agree, other countries, we probably take more care in getting a balanced point of view than most.

KENNEDY: I don't know about other countries because I don't know about television in other countries sufficiently, except that I've always struck me that in America they're pretty good at getting a balanced point of view. If you look at things like MEET THE NATION, er.. I get so muddled is it MEET THE NATION and FACE THE PRESS or FACE THE NATION and MEET THE PRESS? I mean they're pretty good at, I think, a balanced point of view. I mean there's a lot of things that are wrong with American television, I wouldn't have thought that was one of them.

CAIN: You must meet quite.. well you obviously do meet a lot of people in a programme like DID YOU SEE...? who have got criticisms of television. Do you see any kind of pattern in that on this question of say political bias, (YES) or too much violence, or too many repeats or I mean whatever...?

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KENNEDY: I think the general thing I hear most of is there's too much rubbish. And I always take up that criticism and I say, "It is not fair for you to single out television as containing a disproportion amount of rubbish." I say that "All books contain a disproportionate amount of rubbish, so do theatres, so do films, so do magazines, so do newspapers. Don't single out television." I mean the nature of those sort of beasts, they cater for every type of opinion and thing and er... and you'll find that the majority probably is rubbish, but television is no different in that way, sorry.

CAIN: It is unfortunate that in a democracy of our kind a lot of people like rubbish, depending how you define rubbish, of course!

KENNEDY: Well, depending how you...but I mean one of the interesting things in that way is the sort of ludicrous progress of .. or decline of TV-AM. I mean when you remember Peter Jay's wonderful thing about a bias against understanding and we were going to give the nation all its information in the early morning, and the IBA going along with that. And that supine wretched body, the IBA, led by that idiotic man, Thompson, just has watched this programme decline in standards through the years, and not only decline in standards but at the same time er.. come up from bankruptcy to credit, as you might expect if you put on rubbish and sit back and do nothing. It's pathetic!

CAIN: Yes, I agree with you. Is there anything in the charge and do you try and do anything about it on DID YOU SEE...? that it obviously tends to have middle class people on it and that you don't get quotes "the workers" view? I mean is that a tenable criticism, and is it possible for television to

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bring, quotes, "working class people" or....?

KENNEDY: Well, we've had Janet Street-Porter...(LAUGHTER) ~~Had~~ And Benny Green. I mean...

CAIN: Hardly your typical worker...

KENNEDY: Well, hardly your typical worker, but then who.. who is your typical worker? I mean who.. what we try and get is people who are articulate. Now if you know.. if you know a worker, and I'm sure there some around, I mean I'm sure there are thousands around, if you can find one whose got an interest in the Arts but in fact is a fitter in... Swann Hunter and ~~William~~ Wyham Richardson, but has a great interest in the Arts and can talk intelligently and critically, give me his name and we'll get him on the programme.

CAIN: Of course, yes. Well I think that leads nicely into my last question, and it's probably a rather rambling one, but it's obvious that in some sense broadcasting like a lot of other institutions in this country is in some kind of trouble. It's going through traumas due to new technologies like cable and satellite. It has money problems because of the licence fee question and should we have advertising and so on. Now, as a sort of intermediary, because you're not in the organisation but you work for them, I'd be interested to know your views on the present state of British broadcasting. Is it in such a Hell of a mess that people say or...?

KENNEDY: I don't think it's so much in a mess as it's in a time of profound change. But to me the interesting thing is, and this is reflected by I think the success of DID YOU SEE...? (I did mention this earlier to you) I .. I think that people...

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We are very conservative as a nation and the great boom in cable television they've had in the United States is being very very much slower here. Er.. but the emphasis here has been on video, on, you know buy your own video or record your own programme or hire your own thing. But I think there'll be a lot more of that. I don't know how successful satellite, and more cable will be. I would think not as much as people perhaps think, because I do think... it's a funny thing this, we're a small country, we're a small island, we're all very close together, we all know a lot about each other. The newspapers reflect the... this sounds a paradox, I was going to say the cohesiveness of our society, or the cohesion of our society, when at a time it is not particularly cohesive, but that I think is due to the.. Mrs Thatcher's Government. I think that's due to a.. it's a very divisive Government, but I think basically speaking we are cohesive, we do care about each other and we do like to know what we're all doing and therefore we like to have television programmes we can share and we can talk about, and I think that will go on actually for a very long time. I hope the BBC stays basically as it is and doesn't take advertising because I think that those who criticise it might feel that if it went away it would be a slightly poorer world. It still stands for something. I don't just mean in standards. I mean it stands for something which I think is really rather.. it is certainly standards, but something which sort of in itself is part of our history and it's just got to be edged and nudged forward and it's got to have proper people running it instead of Stuart Young and Alistair Milne, who I.. both like very much as people but in my view not fitted for those jobs. That's I think what I'd say about that.

CAIN: Is it worrying to you as it is slightly to me

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that the quality of people that are required to run these great institutions doesn't seem to be there?

KENNEDY: I think it's there if whoever is in charge of Appointments will start looking for the right people. I mean I can think of.. of people who.. I think it was a greaty pity in a way that one... no, I don't know, I'm..qualified about this but Robin Day put in for being DG and Director General of the IBA. Well, I'm glad he didn't get DG of the IBA.. is a.. not much of a job, but it is at the BBC. I think he'd of er... I don't say he would have been everybody's cup of tea..

CAIN: He'd of gingered it up.

KENNEDY: But he'd of gingered it up no end and he'd of had his nose into every department (YES) and found out what was going on. He'd of been, in many ways, a brilliantly imaginative appointment, (YES) but people you see don't have the guts to do that. I mean I wrote to George Howard when Alistair Milne, looked was going to be appointed after him. And I said, "George, I've known Alistair for years, I'm devoted to him, I've made programmes with him but he is not I promise you the right man for this job." I said, "Wenham's better.." and Wenham would have been better. Now Wenham's got many... he's a sort of introspective man in many ways and he's a..

CAIN: Cynical.

KENNEDY: Cynical and he's a bit secretive and I don't think... You see, what the Director General of the BBC needs .. he needs a voice to speak out, you know, and that's what Reith did and that's what Greene did. I mean we knew who they were. They were outgoing people. It's as much of a PR job as anything. And when he makes a speech it must be a speech which will be reported

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in the papers and which must have the right words. It must be a speech of a man who knows how to write, or can get people to write for him.

CAIN: A bit of charisma.

KENNEDY: A bit of charisma, of bottom and gravitas. I don't know whether Jeremy Isaacs could do it. I think he'd certainly be better than anybody else I know.

CAIN: As you.. do you think that the coming of Channel 4 has had any significant effect on the so-called ecology?

KENNEDY: Ecology? (COUGH)

CAIN: Don't they call it the ec... doesn't Aubrey refer to the ecology of broadcasting...?

KENNEDY: Oh oh yes I see, yes. He may do like one refers to the radio as the wireless.

CAIN: Yes.

KENNEDY: (LAUGH) Yes, I.. no, I don't think it's made very much difference to the existing networks. I think it has added enormously. I think Jeremy Isaacs has been brilliant here. It's added something which just wasn't there before and given lots of people the opportunity to experiment. Channel 4 News is probably the best News of all the channels. It's got some marvellous programmes which you just wouldn't see on any of the others, not even on BBC-2. So I think it parallels BBC-2, I don't think it really competes with it.

CAIN: It shows that there is a lot more talent in the nation for doing these things than we perhaps thought.

KENNEDY: Yes, well it does, but I don't think there's all that much. I mean I don't think we've got room for a fifth channel.

CAIN: Mmm You don't think there are a whole lot of

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mute inglorious
~~muting~~ glorious... whatever they are, Milton's?

KENNEDY: I.. I would be slightly surprised. I would think they could fit themselves into one of the existing.... (LAUGH)

CAIN: What about the licence fee? Do you have any view on that, do you think it'll surive and do you think that's a proper way of funding?

KENNEDY: Well, I can't think of a better and if you (COUGH) take it in terms of being under £5 a month, for what you get for it it's so cheap it's unbelieveable. It's absolutely unbelieveable for under £5 a month you can get that kind of access to entertainment.

CAIN: Of the many people that you meet and interview on DID YOU SEE...? and other places do you find many of them complaining about it in fact?

KENNEDY: No, no I don't. No, I don't. Mark you the.. the people it hits are the poor and the old age pensioners and I mean whether something could be done in that direction I don't know. But even so, I mean since the old age pensioners have it as one of their prime sources of information and entertainment I think it's only reasonable that you know a fair proportion of their income should go on it. It does seem anomalous. The greatest anomaly of course is that even if you don't want to watch the BBC and only want to watch ITV you've still got to pay for it and that seems a little .. a little sort of unjust in a way, but I don't see anything really very much better. It'll be interesting to see what Peacock says.

CAIN: The argument is, of course, that it does do that little bit, stand off the BBC from political control and on the whole would you say that the BBC, given the fact that it makes mistakes like REAL LIVES and so on, that on the whole it

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manages to do that in a way that's realistic?

KENNEDY: Yes, er.. what that it... that it?

CAIN: It stands off from Government?

KENNEDY: Oh yes oh it does and you see the.. Yes, it not only stands off from Government, but I mean it's a.. (COUGH) its a natural role is in some ways er.. opposition.

CAIN: To be agin the Government, whatever the Government is?

KENNEDY: Yeah, exactly whatever the Government is.

CAIN: Which is why it's always going to be unpopular.

KENNEDY: And why it's always going to be unpopular with whatever Government there is. I mean journalists, and I use the word in the broad sense, and politicians, are in different camps. They're trying to do different things and neither... I mean each will try and put a spoke in the wheel of the other.

CAIN: So of all the politicians that you've met and interviewed can you see any pattern of opposition more on the left or the right or would you say it's six of one and half a dozen of the other?

KENNEDY: Opposition.. what to?

CAIN: More from the left...

KENNEDY: Opposition to what though?

CAIN: To the BBC?

KENNEDY: Oh to the BBC?

CAIN: Yes. I've heard it said that... that conservatives generally speaking in .. historically have been more favourably disposed towards the BBC but I mean I find...

KENNEDY: I don't agree with that, no.

CAIN: No.

KENNEDY: I would think... I'm only now going not from

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what anybody's said to me in a studio but what I read in the papers, and my feeling is that the c.. that this Government anyway, this Cabinet and these Ministers are more suspicious of the BBC than anybody in the Labour Party. That's my feeling, I don't know whether it's true or not.

CAIN: Is it also your feeling that on the whole politicians rate the broadcasting issue fairly low on their agenda whatever party they are? That very few parties have got a serious broadcasting policy?

KENNEDY: Nobody is going to win a.. or lose an election on what they're going to say about broadcasting, (NO) it's a peripheral issue, of that I have no doubt at all. So I don't think it's really very important.

CAIN: Well, that leads me to my last question really. All these years you've spent in broadcasting as I have, has your opinion about it changed or have you always felt that it's basically a medium that entertains people and fills their hours or do you feel it has any serious social purpose?

KENNEDY: (LAUGH) Discuss on two sides of the ~~pavement~~ paper. (LAUGH)

CAIN: Yes (COUGH)... only on one side at once.

KENNEDY: One side at once. Yeah. Um.. well I think it does both things but I wouldn't want to sort of write down and compartmentalise them. (YES) What it has meant for me is... I hope what it has meant for me is making people better informed. I think that's the simplest way I can put it. I could make a long thing but I think .. I've got to .. to a certain degree to entertain them to get them to listen, but having done that I am then hoping to feed them with information which perhaps they didn't know before or a view they hadn't heard before which might arouse

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their interest. And indeed from the letters I've had over the years and other presenters have had over the years, I think to that degree we've succeeded. Sometimes we've obviously failed, but to that degree, to be able to address a vast audience er...in millions and hope in some way not to influence them - I would never wish to influence them but I would like to put various alternatives to them. That I .. that I think has been a worthwhile job.

Questions added.

CAIN: Do you think that the experience of people like yourself and Robin Day and so on could be used more by organisations like the BBC, that you're sort of regarded too much as outsiders?

KENNEDY: It's not so much as outsiders that we're regarded, though that certainly is true, but it's more... I think we're more regarded as hired hands. We're not part of the BBC machinery. We're... they say, "Who shall we get to present this programme or this series of programmes? Let's get Robin, let's get Ludo, let's get whoever it is..." And in one comes. But they never feel...(COUGH) they never feel that you're part of the works as it were and I think this is very unfortunate with a result that we never really are privy or party to (COUGH) to occasions or decisions or anything which are often made by the administration. Now, I put forward an idea and it was welcomed by Roger Laughton, but I don't... I think it's now died a death, that at least once a month, senior...editors and senior presenters or middle of the road, whatever you like, should have a sort of buffet lunch where we could all get together and exchange ideas. I never see any other presenters, unless I happen to in a pub or something, or in the club. I never see other producers. Now, if we had this

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kind of thing from time to time (COUGH) it would be a most marvellously useful pool for exchanging ideas and probably lead to .. to other programmes. And there's a second reason I think it's rather bad this, and that is very often when the BBC is giving important lunches or dinners and that kind of thing to people, it rarely asks presenters. It will ask probably Sir Robin because he's a sort of mascot now and a symbol of the BBC, but that's about it. And I think that they should in a way.... I think there should be a... what I'm saying is I think there should be a much closer liaison, generally speaking, between the producers and administrators of the BBC and the people who present its programmes for them.

CAIN: Because of course it's the presenters who the public on the whole think of as the BBC.

KENNEDY: That's the point. That is the whole point. The public identifies itself with the presenters but not with the.. the names. I mean Brian Wenham may be Controller of Programmes but the public doesn't really know who he is or who anybody else is and Graeme McDonald they don't...(LAUGH)

CAIN: Do you get very much mail, correspondence from the public?

KENNEDY: From the public?

CAIN: Mmm

KENNEDY: Er.. yes I've always had a bit. At the moment I wouldn't think it runs more than half a dozen letters a week. It doesn't really touch on this sort of thing.

CAIN: No, but it.. I was just thinking en passant, do you ever get anything in those letters which are of any real interest or on the whole is it sort of rather trivial?

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KENNEDY: Very, very rarely. Nearly always (COUGH) - I'm so sorry, - (COUGH) nearly it's always about somebody wanting to express a view. (COUGH)

CAIN: Mmm

KENNEDY: It may be a critical view, it may be a complimentary view. And that's quite interesting I get about both, equally things.. but that's what it nearly always is. And every now and again I get a gem of a letter which... I mean really is really interesting, and I try and answer them all even if it's only an acknowledgment on a postcard. But (COUGH) most of them one has to read through as a kind of duty and God, most of them sometimes, . not most of them, but occasionally you get one that runs to 12 or 15 pages.

CAIN: Mmm (LAUGH)

END OF INTERVIEW

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