

A FOREIGN SERVICE INSPIRATION FROM JOHN F. KENNEDY VERSUS POLITICAL DREAMS OF THE SENATE

QUINN: But when Kennedy became president, which was the year after I graduated from high school (1960), of course I paid close attention to him and whatever he said. It was such an astounding development that suddenly changed everything. I think it really broadened my horizons. I recall specifically that Kennedy had said that if he hadn't gone into politics that he would have wanted to be a Foreign Service Officer. That's when my focus on the Foreign Service began. It seemed to be a high prestige, elite, hard-to-attain type of career that involved one in matters of great consequence.

Beyond that, Kennedy gave you the sense that the world with all of its problems was out there, and that America had a positive, leadership role to play in it. He talked about the New Frontier and what America could do. America's central leadership role in the world began to be intriguing to me. It seemed that America was this incredible force for good and that America could do almost anything it put its mind to.

Moreover, Washington seemed like the center of the universe, which was reinforced by my reading the novel *Advise and Consent*, which was about the world of politics in the US Senate. I had never been to Washington and it began to have a magical, almost mystical, attraction for me. I dreamed of being a United States Senator or a Foreign Service Officer, just like Kennedy.

Q: Oh yes.

QUINN: So, all of a sudden, it became so interesting, so intriguing. Oh, if I could ever, some day ever go to Washington D.C., just to be there in the midst of all of it, was my vision. But what an impossible dream it was, if you were from Dubuque, Iowa, like me. Washington seemed so far away. I'd never even been on a plane. I had had this train trip from New York, but, Washington -- I mean Des Moines was almost like a foreign trip from Dubuque, it was so far away. So going to Washington was almost unthinkable. But by the end of high school, between ROTC and Jack Kennedy and his legacy in Dubuque, they all had combined to make me interested in politics and foreign affairs.

Q: Well, I mean were you up to that point particularly interested in doing well in school?

QUINN: Oh yes. I was very interested in doing well in school, and I did well. At Loras Academy I was at or near the top of my class. I led the honor roll a couple of times in my class, and it was that plus being involved in sports and, and doing well in military subjects, that got me named the top military cadet in my senior year at Wahlert.

Q: In all this time, did you -- would your family take trips anywhere, or did you see much of the country or not, or?

QUINN: No, not at all. I'm trying to remember any vacation trip we might have taken. When we lived in New York City, I recall vaguely a trip to a lake in Connecticut and those weeks at Bel Harbor on the ocean just outside the city. In Wisconsin, we took a day trip to Wisconsin Dells once. Other than that, I don't remember taking any family trips or vacations. Maybe a Sunday drive to Peoria or Farmer's City in Illinois.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: We drove to Peoria one Sunday from Bloomington when I was in sixth grade. My Dad didn't have a driver's license yet, just a permit. He wasn't supposed to be driving alone. He almost rolled our 47 Plymouth over when he went slightly off the highway. I can still hear my Mom yelling "Jesus, Mary and Good St. Joseph," when it appeared we were about to roll over. Then, later during our drive through Peoria, he struck a parked car.

Q: Oh boy.

QUINN: (laughs) It was a parked car and nobody was in it. He broke the taillight, so he stuffed some money in the broken light and we high tailed it back to Bloomington. We were afraid he would be arrested because he wasn't supposed to be driving. He had bought a car but had no driver's license. He was still learning to drive. Living in New York, he never had to drive. And he didn't drive in La Crosse because we lived so close to downtown. But, even though he could now drive, I don't remember going anywhere else in the Midwest on a vacation with my family.

While I was in college, I made a road trip to New York. My assignment was to pick up my Grandmother Maudie and her sister, my Aunt Kitty and drive them to Dubuque to be with my Mom, who yearned for their presence as a stabilizing element for her. My friend Ronnie McDermott made the trip with me, sharing the driving as we traversed the toll roads over several days until we rolled into New York City through the Lincoln Tunnel. Not sure which way to go, we made a right turn and were suddenly in a line to go back through the Tunnel. A New York City policeman, seeing our Iowa license plates, took pity on us and stopped traffic so we could extricate ourselves.

So we headed for Aunt Kitty's apartment on 57th Street between First Avenue and Sutton Place where we would stay for a few days resting before setting out on the return journey. In the end, Maudie and Aunt Kitty decided the trip would be too arduous for them, so we drove back alone.

Before doing so, however, we had several nights out on the town, including a trip to the Copa Cabana night club with my Uncle Johnny Keating.

Another night, we somehow met two girls and took them to the Peppermint Lounge on 45th Street, where Joey Dee and the Star Lighters were performing the mega hit Peppermint Twist and people were doing that new dance craze on a cramped dance floor. Looking back, it was a remarkable experience for a kid from Iowa. Having been alive when rock n' roll was born in 1955, now here I was in the heart of Manhattan, doing the latest radical dance innovation [in which you never touched your partner] at one of the earliest and most iconic venues in the history of early rock music.

Having practiced my moves in New York, shortly after returning to Dubuque, I took a date to the brand new Timmerman's Super Club in East Dubuque, Illinois [where liquor by the drink could be sold, unlike Iowa where only beer could be served in bars and restaurants]. Timmermans had live music and a dance floor, but generally attracted an older clientele. When the band started playing the Twist, my date and I were the only ones who had developed the knack for doing the gyrations involved. We were soon surrounded by all of the other, older couples who were watching us and clapping. I distinctly recall several of the women shouting "Look at him go." It was absolutely the only time in my life that anyone paid any attention to my moves on the dance floor.

Q: By the time you graduated -- 1960, is that right?

QUINN: High school.

Q: During that summer and all, did you get involved in the political campaign? It was Nixon versus Kennedy.

QUINN: No. I didn't. I wasn't active politically at all. I wasn't sure whether I was a Democrat or Republican. But, I was fascinated by watching the competition of electoral politics. I attended Loras College in Dubuque. It was the same campus where I went to high school for three years. It was an all-male Catholic institution of about 1,500 students. Every four years' there was an event at Loras College called the Mock Convention. I did get involved in that in '64 when we had a mock Republican presidential convention. I got to play a role in it as chair of the Massachusetts delegation and we succeeded in nominating Henry Cabot Lodge. But everyone took part whether you were a Republican or Democrat. So, no, I wasn't involved in any real political activity. I remember there were a few individuals in our class who were more politically oriented and who either liked Nixon or who liked Kennedy. And of course, since we were Catholics, we were supposed to like Kennedy.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: (laughs) He was a Catholic. And I remember we had been told by the nuns that Catholics could not be president. That's how I grew up, knowing I could never be president.

Q: Well, how did you find, looking back on it, up through -- well, through college -- but through grade school and all, how pervasive was the influence of the nuns and the fathers?

QUINN: Oh. The nuns and the fathers were enormously influential. All through high school and college I was a practicing Catholic. I was an altar boy. I led prayers at Mass on Sunday. In college I became a sports coach in Catholic grade schools. So I would work with the priests. Living up to the Catholic ideal and the Catholic standard and conducting your life that way was a significant obligation. You were supposed to act a certain way that your faith dictated. It was about believing in God and going to church and acting in a way that Jesus would want you to act. And it meant being religious and being pious and being a part of the sacraments and the ceremonies. I loved High Mass-the Gregorian Chant, the incense, the rituals, the architecture of the church. It was mesmerizing and very powerful. Reading the prayers in Latin contributed to the sense of mystery of the Mass and made you feel part of a two century old tradition. It made the mysteries of the religion believable.

The Church, the school, the ethics, it all was the structure of your life. You adhered to it, because if you broke it you would receive the stigma of being looked down on by those whose respect you enormously desired: the priests, the nuns, your parents and your neighbors. The priests were revered and had a respected position. There were no problems of the kind that there are today. The priesthood was not besmirched. There was on the Loras college campus a three story residence hall just for undergrads who were studying to become priests.

Q: I have to ask a question.

QUINN: Yeah, sure.

Q: But there was none of this taint of homosexuality or anything like that from the Fathers?

QUINN: There were a couple of priests who had a reputation among the students when we were in college that they might be oriented that way. There were one or two. There were stories around that I think were credible of them being interested in the boy students. So there was a little bit of that around.

Q: But they were kind of to be avoided.

QUINN: Yes, that's right. You kept your distance.

Q: That took care of it.

QUINN: Yes, generally.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: They stayed away from the boys who were athletes.

Q: Yeah.

QUINN: It wasn't a big thing, but it was certainly there. I could tell you the names right now of who they were. But I won't.

Q: But I --

QUINN: You didn't want to be around them.

Q: But it's -- I think it's important to try to capture as much of the feeling --

QUINN: Yeah.

Q: By the way, were you picking up -- I was sort of removed from things and even in those days in Wisconsin. But, what about race relations? Did that even cross your radar or not?

QUINN: There were almost no Black people in Dubuque. There were some in Waterloo and Davenport, but those cities were 90 miles away. So we played football and basketball in high school against Black kids from those cities. But race wasn't an everyday issue. There were very few Jewish kids. I went out with a Jewish girl in high school named Donna "Fibber" Farber. Some of my friends would kid me by calling me "Kosher Ken." But it wasn't hateful, just unusual. It didn't dissuade me. Forty years later, that girl --now a grown woman--came to the ceremony when I was sworn in as Ambassador.

Q: What about Protestants? , I was born in '28 and brought up in sort of an Episcopalian, not a very developed Episcopalian thing. But I was kind of -- in my group we were kind of warned against, "You really don't want to mess around with Catholic girls."

QUINN: That sounds right.

Q: Because Catholic girls will make your kids be Catholic.

QUINN: Yeah.

Q: And somehow or other this was the end of the world.

QUINN: Yeah.

Q: So you didn't do that.

QUINN: Mixed marriage? Oh no, it was frowned on.

Q: Did you --

QUINN: I like to tell people for my family a mixed marriage was an Irish Catholic and a German Catholic.

Growing up, for us Catholics Protestants were considered different. There was a sense that we were two camps that rarely interacted. The one thing we Catholics had in common was that we all prayed in Latin. And if you went to Catholic school, all you dealt with were Catholics. So there was a separation from Protestants, as opposed to anything that was based on animosity. The nuns and priests would say ours is the only one true faith, and because we have this status, we will go to Heaven and the Protestants won't, and aren't we lucky that we're the ones to be saved. (laughs).

Q: Well I interviewed Bob Strauss who was ambassador to the Soviet Union.

QUINN: This is the USTR (United States Trade Representative) person?

Q: Yes, this is the Head of the Democratic Party.

QUINN: Yes, that Bob Strauss.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

QUINN: I worked with him briefly and admired Bob Strauss enormously.

Q: Jewish, a Jewish Texan.

QUINN: I never knew his religion

Q: And he said his mother told him, he said at one time when he was sort of young "Bobby you're Jewish and we're the chosen race. But don't tell other people."

QUINN: (laughs)

Q: So he said he used to walk around feeling, Gee, I'm chosen.

QUINN: And, we Catholics would say they're not. It's us!

Q: And they're not.

QUINN: Yeah.

Q: So we all had these views--

QUINN: I had a different connection to Jews. Although I never went to the temple, my Uncle Sammy was Jewish. He married my grandmother Maudie's sister, Kathryn Davin. Her married name was Kathryn Lipshie. He was an extremely successful business man who was president of a shirt company named Salant and Salant. So we had a number of Jewish friends and relatives. I remember my Uncle Solly, whose name was Solomon Rausch. He always drove big Buicks and would come to our house in the Bronx. When he was there, we would get to sit in the car and play like we were driving, or if we were lucky, actually go for a ride. On other occasions, he would drive us out to Bel Harbor in the summer where we would stay near my Aunt Kitty and Uncle Sam's summer place. It was on or near 116th Street. They had a summer house and we would get a room in a boarding house nearby, just a few blocks from the beach. There were very nice to us. As I said, I was born in Jewish Memorial Hospital.

Q: Mm-hmm.

QUINN: Because that's I think what my Uncle Sam arranged.

Q: Mm-hmm.

QUINN: That's why I was born there. I don't remember thinking of him as being a Jew and being different. But I was aware he was Jewish as was my Uncle Solly.

Q: No, and this is very much an, very, very American in a way.

QUINN: Yeah. When I was in my 20s living in College Park and going to graduate school, I met a Jewish girl at a mixer. Her name was Debbie Kahanowitz and she had graduated from Syracuse. We really hit it off and dated for over a year and were pretty serious for a while. Then as I was headed to Vietnam, we broke it off.

Q: I mean the way it should have been. Not always.

QUINN: In Dubuque, there were only a couple of Jewish families. I went out with one of the Farber girls, Donna Farber. Her nickname was "Fibber." And she had a couple of brothers and they lived right up in our neighborhood. I have very nice memories of her and her family. So while we went to different schools, I would sometime see them in the same stores. But I also learned a terrible lesson about the pain inflicted by anti-Semitism or racism. I remember her brother Jimmy Farber walked into the neighborhood store where teenagers hung out. I saw him and waved and he smiled. There was a bunch of Catholics sitting in the back of the store talking among themselves. One of the guys wanting to criticize another for being cheap in not buying a soft drink said in a loud voice, "Oh, you're a damn Jew." He hadn't seen Jimmy Farber coming in the store. He wasn't talking about him, just making what he considered a jocular jab at his friend.

Q: No, no.

QUINN: He didn't mean to say it in front of Jimmy. But, I remember the look on Jimmy's face. When he heard that, his smile changed to a frown and a terrible look of hurt. I thought oh, my gosh, what a horrible thing to have happened. I remember that moment to this day, and never ever wanted to be part of anything that could inflict such pain on someone about any aspect of their life, including race or religion.

Q: Mm-hmm.

QUINN: But in Dubuque, our world was divided into Catholics and Protestants. And they were the other guys. They had opposed the Pope and there had been this schism of Christianity and this had been awful. To us Catholics, Protestants should have been listening to the Pope the way we do, since the Pope is really the one who has inherited the mantle of Jesus.

Q: Get with the program.

QUINN: Protestants seemed to exist in a separate and very different world than me as I was growing up in high school and in college. I never went to school with non-Catholics until I started my Ph.D. program.

Q: Mm-hmm.

QUINN: Even in college, Protestants seemed almost a separate entity with whom I didn't have a lot of interaction. Other guys did, if they dated girls from public high school.

Q: In 1960 you went to where?

QUINN: I went to Loras College, a small Catholic liberal arts institution in Dubuque with about 1,500 male students. So, I went from three years of high school at Loras Academy, to one year at Wahlert High School (the brand new Catholic co-ed school), and then back over to the Loras campus for four more years of all male college education, basically in the same place where I spent high school. I lived at home, so there was nothing like the experience a student has when they go away to college. I often make the point that Loras was the only college I could possibly have afforded to attend, and only if I lived at home. The tuition at Loras was more than that at the University of Iowa, but when room and board was added, going away to college was impossible. I tell young people today, that in my time the University of Iowa was for rich kids. I felt lucky to be able to go to college. Loras made that possible. But, I never had the experience of the start of the transition to adulthood that comes with going away to college at age 18.

Q: Where is the name Loras --

QUINN: Loras is the family name of the first bishop of Dubuque, a French priest named Matthias Loras, who arrived in Iowa in the mid-1830s. That was about 40 years after the first European settler in Iowa arrived, a fur trapper named Julien Dubuque. The French explorers and settlers all came down the Mississippi River just as Louis Joliet and Pere Marquette had. Iowa was French territory until 1804, so there was considerable French influence. These French priests established Saint Raphael Seminary to train priests in 1839, which made it the first institution of higher learning in Iowa. And eventually, the college was re-named in honor of its founder and the first bishop. Bishop Loras, in fact, was the archbishop of the entire American west from the Mississippi River out to the border of California where the Franciscan missionaries were in charge.

Q: Good.

QUINN: Loras was a diocesan college. It was the only college I could afford. I couldn't afford to go to the University of Iowa. Without Loras, I could not have gone to college. I worked through high school and college, first in my Dad's store for 60 cents an hour and subsequently at a variety of other jobs, including the Post Office at Christmas and at Myers-Cox a wholesale tobacco and candy company. I did this to save for college and to put gas in my 1950 Ford [that cost \$95], so I would be able to drive around and "drag the gut" as going up and down Main Street was known in those days. It was like something out of the movie American Graffiti, but with a much less cool car.

I earned a little money in contests run by local civic clubs in Dubuque, that held competitions for graduating high school seniors. The first one I entered was run by the Chamber of Commerce. The question was about coming issues in business. I don't know where it came from but I wrote an essay about the problems that would be encountered in the future as automation took away jobs now performed by salaried workers and union members. I was so proud of it, even though it pointed to a somewhat dark future. Needless to say, not being upbeat, it did not get chosen for a monetary prize.

Having learned my lesson, I took first place in the Kiwanis Club competition, where the topic was "What does Dubuque have to offer to new graduates." I received a \$100 prize [which was a huge amount, equivalent to half a semester's tuition] and got to read my essay at the Club luncheon, where the members enjoyed my optimistic overview. But the money helped a lot with my first year tuition and to this day whenever I am invited to speak at a Rotary or civic club, I almost always accept, as a way to say thank you for that desperately needed support I received all those years ago.

I also worked on the Loras campus all four years earning money in the library and working at intramural sporting events to offset tuition. I could not have afforded to go to Loras, if I had to live in a dorm. It was only by living at home that college could be financially possible, and even then I had to work my way through school. That was college life for me, basically the same experience as high school, but just with some more well off guys from Chicago and other parts of Iowa on the campus.

Q: What was it like?

QUINN: I lived at home! I didn't go off to a campus in a far-away place and have that new exciting phase of life that most 18 year olds experience when they leave home for the first time. I just continued that same sort of life as in high school. I lived at home and drove to campus each day, but now earned college credits instead of high school ones. Of course, some of the people I interacted with were different, in that they came from Chicago or western Iowa. But, I basically

had the same friends that I had in high school. The student body at Loras was about 1,500, all male at the time