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This oral history interview is part of the Richard J. Daley Oral History Collection at the Special Collections and University Archives Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago. It has been used to create content for the online exhibit, Remembering Richard J. Daley, <http://rjd.library.uic.edu> , published on July 20, 2015.

Special Collections & University Archives
Richard J. Daley Library
University of Illinois at Chicago
801 S. Morgan St.
Chicago, IL 60607
3rd Floor
(312) 996-2742

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Final

President Carter
Oral History Interview
The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia
University of Illinois at Chicago
Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections
Interviewed by Marie Scatena
October 17, 2014

Carter: I'm not an expert on Mayor Daley, you know, but I can tell you what I know about him.

Q: Well, I'm not either.

Carter: Okay. What is this going to be for?

Q: This is for the University of Illinois at Chicago, the archives for the Richard J. Daley Library.

Carter: Okay, that's good. He deserves it.

Q: We're thrilled.

Carter: He was one of my favorite people. I liked him.

Filmmaker: Okay, Matt, are you ready?

Filmmaker: If I could get you just to stand up for one second.

Q: Sure.

Filmmaker: Come this way.

Q: So I'm going to just slate the interview for the archives because the transcripts will be going into the library (It is October 17, 2014. My name is Marie Scatena and I am interviewing President Carter at the Carter Center in Atlanta.)

Carter: Okay, very good.

Q: I have some questions— we need your memories of the mayor.

Carter: All right.

Q: I have some questions, but however you'd like to begin.

Carter: Well, I first met Mayor Daley when I began to campaign for President. And I had a man named Jim Wall who was running my campaign in Illinois. He was the editor of the "Christian Century" magazine, and a former Georgian who had moved up to near Chicago. And when I first went to Illinois to campaign James Wall suggested I go by and just meet Mayor Daley as a matter of courtesy, which I did.

And for some reason, although I was a peanut farmer from Georgia and from a little tiny town of just 600 people, I felt at ease with him. I liked

him and he liked me. We just had a conversation that was longer than either one of us had scheduled.

And then when I became more active and began to win some elections, and I came in first in Iowa, I came in first in New Hampshire, I came in first in Florida, it became obvious that I was a very serious candidate. And then I talked to Mayor Daley every time I went up to that part of America and enjoyed it because I looked forward to seeing him. And he would tell me about his theory of running a city, which he did quite well, I think.

And he told me that Adlai Stevenson the third would be running as a favorite candidate and that he was going to support Adlai Stevenson, Jr., particularly around Chicago. And I talked to Jim Wall about it, and he suggested that I tell Mayor Daley that I would not concentrate on the city of Chicago or that environment, that I would concentrate on the rural area of Illinois instead. And I think Mayor Daley appreciated my deferring to him in that way. Of course what television advertisement we had also covered Chicago.

And to make a long story short, although Adlai Stevenson campaigned, and everybody knew that Mayor Daley was supporting him as a favorite son, I won Illinois I think two to one. And toward the end of the campaign period, I think on the last day of the campaign, probably in May of '76—I don't remember exactly—there were five states involved, and Ohio was one of them. And Mayor Daley announced to the public, and sent me

word, that if I won in Ohio that he would throw his support to me. And I did win in Ohio.

So when I got home on the last day of the campaign, Mayor Daley called me and told me that I would get not only the delegates that I had won, which was two-thirds of the Illinois delegates, but that I would also get all the delegates that Adlai Stevenson had won around Chicago, so Mayor Daley had those delegates in his hands and he delivered them to me.

At one time I remember that Mayor Daley had a health problem shortly before I came to see him. He had been in the hospital. I don't remember if it was his heart or whatever it was. And I suggested that he take some time off and go down to the islands of Georgia, and I would have some people who were friends of mine down around Brunswick to greet him and make sure he had a nice time in Georgia, so I think he really appreciated that as well.

I was very sad when he died. He had a successor named Bilandic, I think, and he got in trouble on reelection day because they had had a four or five inch snowstorm that had tied up traffic, and he lost the election to a woman who promised to support me and lied about it. But anyway, that didn't involve Mayor Daley.

I met all of Mayor Daley's family when I was with him and visiting with him, including when I was President and went back there shortly. And also I met Mayor Bilandic's family. After he was defeated, I went to his house.

So I really admired what Mayor Daley did in administering the affairs of Chicago. In fact I used this in two or three speeches while I was President, that in Chicago, for instance, if a street light burned out, everybody would know who was responsible, because the people in that particular precinct got their jobs from Mayor Daley if they were loyal to him and to the Democratic Party.

But their job would be to take care of the street lights on that particular block, and if a street light burned out everybody would know that so-and-so's responsible for street lights. But if a street light burned out in New York City, nobody would have the slightest idea who was responsible for it. It is a big bureaucracy. So I kind of admired that about the way Mayor Daley ran the city. I think those are the things I remember about it. Now you can ask me the questions you want to.

Q: Well, speaking of cities and the way cities are run, what are some of the memories you have of the way that Mayor Daley ran the city that maybe could be applicable now to big cities?

Carter: Well, I think I just covered that as best I can. You know, I don't think there's any doubt in Chicago that if you were loyal to the mayor's political

party that you would be given a job to do. And the jobs were, at least at the lower levels, were quite practical. It was something that you actually did and you worked at it. I don't know about the higher levels, whether they were just political. I don't understand, didn't know about that. I never did live in Chicago.

But there was no doubt that the mayor knew what was going on in every part of Chicago. He knew when people died. He went to their funeral. When they had a baby he would write a note to the parents. He was a hands-on politician who loved politics and who loved his city. And in my opinion he was an honest man. He never did profit financially from his enormous responsibility and influence and power.

And I think he saw that loyalty in politics was a very wonderful indication of whether a person would be a good employee or not. If somebody pledged their support to Mayor Daley's candidates and then carried out their promise, I think he saw that as an indication that if they promised to do a good job, they would do a good job.

And so I liked him personally. I knew all of his sons. I knew the ones that...I knew his successor later on as a mayor of Chicago, and I knew the one that served in Washington with the President. In fact when I went down to turn over the Panama Canal to the Panamanians, neither the incumbent President nor Secretary of State were willing to go down there because—given the way the Panama Canal was not politically popular.

But I think the Secretary of Commerce, I believe he was one of Mayor Daley's sons, went down with me. He was the only one from the administration willing to go down there, partly, I think, because I was a friend of his father, but because there had to be some token person from the Clinton administration. But neither Clinton nor Madeleine Albright were willing to go down to Panama and come back and face the still existing irate condemnation of people who said I gave away the Panama Canal.

So I was honored and pleased to be the one that represented the United States. I think that was the only time the President ever came to me and said would you do this for me, and of course I was pleased to do it. But anyway, that was the last time I had any real relationship with the family.

Q: I'm wondering about going back further to the Democratic national conventions. Some of the interviews that we have in our archives, they mentioned that you were very gracious at the '72 and '76 conventions. Do you have any memories of the Daleys then?

Carter: Well, I remember in the '68 convention I think Hubert Humphrey was the (candidate). That's when it was in Chicago, right, and that's when the altercations took place.

Q: Mm-hmm.

Carter: I was not involved in it. I just observed it from a distance. And my son was in the Navy training to go to Vietnam, my oldest son Jack, and he came down to the convention just to observe it. And he told us on the telephone or in a letter, I've forgotten which, that the young demonstrators were on the streets and that the policemen, under the control of Mayor Daley, were quite oppressive to them. But I wasn't involved there.

And by the time I ran, and even planned to run, beginning in 1972, which was in between elections, there had been some very extensive reforms in the Democratic Party nominating process, orchestrated by the former governor of North Carolina. And we considered those quite thoroughly before I announced my plans to run for President. But we practically memorized those new democratic ways of a convention being held in 1976, and that was one of the reasons that I prevailed over the other candidates.

We saw quite early—and I think I was the only candidate who saw this—that it was better for me to run in all states in America that had a contest. I think there were 31 states. And sometimes I would come in first, sometimes I might come in second, sometimes I'd come in as low as fifth.

But even when I would come in fifth, say in the state of Washington, I would get maybe five delegates, and the number one person would get 25 delegates, so I accumulated a vast array of delegates based on the reforms that really went into effect because of the aftermath of the 1968

convention when Hubert Humphrey was nominated. So that's indirectly related to Mayor Daley, but not directly.

Q: Some of the members of the Daley family, in the interviews in this archive, speak very sweetly about you and your family and your mother and your daughter and your meetings, so I appreciate that.

Carter: Well, we were very close to him. I think I went to the funeral, his funeral, and I spoke some words there, and I think you already have them. But I thought he was an honest, friendly, effective political gentleman.

Q: Yeah, I just have two more questions.

Carter: Oh, really? Okay.

Q: Yeah, if that's okay with you. So you're known as a builder, and Mayor Daley, one of his claim to fame in Chicago is that he was a builder.

Carter: Yeah. Well, the architectural achievements of Chicago are still notable, you know, with the innovations that took place, I guess because of his influence. Yeah, my wife and I just got back from Texas. We helped to build 114 houses in six days between Dallas and Forth Worth. We had 5,000 volunteers join us on a Habitat project. And that's the 31st year that we've done that, my wife and I have, so we're still builders, and that's something else I'm grateful to hear you say that I had in common with Mayor Daley.

Q: Mayor Daley was known as a man of faith, tremendous faith.

Carter: Yeah, he was, I know.

Q: He attended daily mass and...

Carter: He did.

Q: So I was wondering about the way that interacts with leadership, and if you can think of something—

Carter: Well, I remember Mayor Daley made a comment about me in the news media, and he said that I was not only competent and understood the nation, but that my religious faith was an indication that I would be an honest politician, which, I remember that very hazily. I think you'll find that that's an accurate quote of his.

And I knew he was a very devout Catholic. I was a devout Protestant. We talked about that sometimes, and when I would meet with him for an hour or so in his office. And I don't think there's any doubt that he felt that the teachings of Christ were completely compatible with the responsibilities of political office—peace and justice and integrity, truth, those kind of things, which are the same characteristics of other religions as well, in addition to Christianity.

But I think he put those into effect. And I think that was why I was able to say, without any equivocation, and with a relative degree of assurance in

my comments at his funeral, that he was an honest man who served his constituency well.

Q: Okay, I just have one last question.

Carter: Do you? Okay.

Q: How do you think he'd like to be remembered?

Carter: He?

Q: Yeah.

Carter: I think maybe some of the things that I've just said; an honest, fair, effective leader who incorporated into his political responsibilities his own religious faith.

Q: That's great. Thank you so much.

Carter: I enjoyed it.

Q: This is really wonderful.

Carter: Well, he's a good man. And getting ready for this interview, I was able to review some of the good memories of him.

Q: Oh, well, that's wonderful. Thank you so much.

Carter: Thanks again.

Q: Thank you.

[End of recording]