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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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Laszlo Kondor Part I
Oral History Interview
Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections
University of Illinois at Chicago
6 November 2013
Interviewed by Marie Scatena

Final

Q: So here we are at the Richard J. Daley Library at the University of Illinois at Chicago. My name is Marie Scatena and I'm sitting here with Laszlo Kondor. It is November 6, 2103 about 1:30 in the afternoon. We're going to speak today, Laszlo about your life, particularly about the years between 1972 and 1976 when you were Richard J. Daley's personal photographer. So, with that introduction, Laszlo if you could say your name one more time for us, and tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Kondor: My name is Laszlo Kondor. I was born March 13, 1940 in Hungary. With my Hungarian parents I come from a family of three children. For my early life—the first memory probably, of my life is probably the very end of the Second World War. Your air force, the U.S. Air Force was bombing us. I'm still mad a little bit about that. And a few years ago—maybe more than five years ago—my American wife's father visited us. And I asked him in conversation, did he ever come to Hungary before. And he said, no but he was above it. I said, 'What do you mean exactly?' Well he was a pilot in the Eighth Air Force bombing Budapest every second day, he said. I said, 'I should really toss you out of my house.' (*Laughter*) But I didn't. Hungary was very heavily bombed from the summer of 1944 on—until the war ended in Hungary, April 1945. And so my very early

recollections of the war were some of these bombings. For months and months we lived in the basement of the house—frightened out of our minds.

Actually one night there was a bombing that I'll never forget. There was a scampering at the door and my father started to go out. And my mother said, 'No Janos, don't, don't, don't, this could be dangerous.' He said, 'How about if it is a wounded man outside?' And so he went up and it wasn't a wounded man—it was a little dog. A little dachshund who we brought in—he was frightened out of his mind. And he stayed with us for fifteen years. *(Laughter)* I don't know if my mother ever actually forgave him for risking his life to go out to save a dog, but he did. *(Laughter)*

Well, the war years were over and the Soviet Army decided not to pack up and go home, but to just stay there and turn Hungary into a communist nation with Poland, the Czech Republic and the rest of them, and Romania became the Eastern Bloc, and we grew up in communism. And we had to do all kinds of stupid parades and we had to clap for Stalin *(Clapping)*, the great leader and you've seen pictures like that. And we didn't like it—it was kind of interesting. I grew up in a village right after war. We ended up in a village about the size of Kapolcs, which is the village where I live now. And I find that kind of interesting—a kind of circularness. I started my life in a small village and maybe I end my life in a small village. And I'm very happy there now, I find myself.

And it was actually a very nice childhood. Nobody had a car—we were very, very poor. But everybody was poor. There was a great equality in that. And as long as you were a child you were not really interested in politics. That whole regime didn't bother you because it didn't really affect you on a daily basis. Thank God. For the parents, it was a different thing. The problems kind of started when you get in your early teen years and

you begin to realize what's really happening around you. And then you became, actually, very schizophrenic. My father was by training a lawyer and a descendant of lower nobility—not aristocracy — don't misunderstand. The lower nobility, the gentry class. So was my mother. They had a sort of lifestyle and mentality and everything. And that's what we learned at home. In the school, because of the communist regime, we were taught something completely different. Of course, the happiness of the proletariat and you know, blah, blah, blah. And so you ended up really—a little bit not fully believing your parents. And absolutely not believing the crap that you get in school. And nobody asked you what you personally believed. And it became a problem. Nobody asked what we wanted.

And then came 1956, when the revolution broke out in October. I was in the second year in high school at the gymnasium, and we found out the revolution broke out in Budapest. And then we got out of the classroom. And many, many—most public buildings under the very roof of it usually there was a gigantic red star display—the sign of communism. We went to the janitorial office with two friends of mine, and our first revolutionary act was to go up on top of the building and we hacked down the red star. It fell down with a hell of a thunder to the ground.

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By that time, the school was all there, all of the teachers, and thousands of people gathering. And when the star fell down, everybody started to sing the Hungarian national anthem. Which was not the communist national anthem—they could never change it---and it starts with, 'God save Hungarians.' Like 'God Save the King,' but even in nineteenth century the Hungarian national anthem started with 'God Save the

People.’ And I get choked up talking about it. And people cried and clapped and all that. My brother was already in Budapest. For the first part of the revolution—I don’t know if you realize it, we succeeded. The Russians pulled out. And four days later on November fourth, they came back, and by that time I was in Budapest to try to find my brother. And I found him ten days later, he was wounded. We stayed in Budapest with some distant relatives and then we went back to our hometown. And there was a big family conference about what to do. My father was a very calm man, and a lawyer by training, he sort of analyzed what was going on—what was happening. My brother was eighteen, I was fifteen only. And he said, ‘Paul you were wounded. They already wanted to take you away from the hospital, the secret police.’ He said, ‘You have to get out of here.’

And he looked at me and he used these words, ‘And you, little idiot, hundreds of people photographed you hacking down the star. And so you are in trouble, too. One, you’ll never be allowed back in high school, you’ll never be allowed to enter the university, and to my brother Paul, and you’ll probably be either be hung, or you will receive many years of a prison sentence. Then my father said, ‘You have no future here. You have to go.’ Can you imagine for a father to tell to his children that? It was hard. ‘You have to get out.’ And we did.

The poor man a couple of months later, was arrested himself, and without trial he spent three years in prison. And when he got out of that, the only job they allowed him to have in the town that we lived—there was a sugar processing plant, from sugar beets—and he could only be the night watchman. From eleven in the evening to six in the morning. That’s the only job he could have. That was bad. And my brother and I left—we really had to. We got into Austria; we got into a refugee camp there. (*Tapping on*

table) My brother was almost immediately hospitalized, he had a high fever. And I think he had a nervous breakdown, too, from everything. But the Austrians were very nice—they took him to Vienna hospital for a couple of months. He was also very skinny. They put him on a very high energy diet or high calorie diet, and he came out and there we were in the free world, not speaking any languages, penniless.

But the one thing that was really incredible at that time, President Eisenhower and the West militarily didn't help the revolution. And at that time I was very mad about it, but later on I realized Ike made a good decision—it could have led to a Third World War if the U.S. gets involved. Because the Soviets claimed Eastern Europe and that was that. They were not about to give it up. Then, I cursed Americans. Later on, it was different. And then we didn't even know where the hell to go. We were in a large camp, which the Russians had just left in Austria a year before, in 1955—a kind of old military base—and we didn't know where to immigrate, what country. We were clueless.

And then one day a Jesuit priest came to the various rooms, and was asking if there was anybody here was in gymnasium, and could prove in any way if they were—a school being already established in Innsbruck, Austria, the Austrian-Hungarian gymnasium which was funded totally by the U.S. government. And you can go there, but who will pay for it? Nothing—everything was provided. So we ended up there. And actually I was thinking—the logic of it was---the length of the lines from the various embassies or consulates to immigrate to was the issue—the U.S. was the longest, and so was England and France—and it was winter. It February, it was very cold, and my brother was still feeling bad, so I stood in the short line to the New Zealand Embassy. The reason was, it was the shortest. So my brother said, 'What will we do in New Zealand?' I read in

geographic books they have a lot of sheep—we will be sheep herders. That was the logic. Anyway, the Jesuit priest came and a couple of days later, collected us and with a train took us down to Austria—to Innsbruck that is—my brother was in the last year of high school.

By the next spring he finished and he went down to Rome and he studied architecture. And I stayed in Austria for a few more years to finish my education there—to finish high school. Then I studied at the university there. My brother came to the United States to Aurora, Illinois because some Hungarian Americans sponsored him to go there. And then I came in 1961—I followed him. Because I don't know—Europe was getting too small for me. In retrospect I'm not sure if I shouldn't have stayed in Austria, but I came. And I joined him in Aurora, Illinois, and then I worked in some steel plant or something—I don't know—for a few months in the summer, and then I looked around and I applied to universities. I told you the story that I finally got an interview with a John T. Netherton, the Dean of the University of Chicago. They were sort of interested in me.

And to make a long story short—I told you the story—how little things can really change your life. Can you imagine that if when the Jesuit priest went from room to room in the refugee camp, and at that time, I was on the toilet? I would have missed that completely. I would have ended up in New Zealand, probably. You know, sheep herding. So, life depends—changes on those little things. So this guy was a great fan of opera—he had records of opera and everything. I just wrote a thing about it. And in Vienna I became a great opera fan and music lover. And that's when, after the war again, they reopened the Vienna Staatsoper. And there was a great performance of Richard

Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* with Elizabeth Schwartzkopf as the Marschallin. And I had the chance to see that a number of times. The rest of the interview with the good dean was opera gossip. Is the chorale really that good? 'Is Elizabeth Schwartzkopf that good?' I almost had to sing the aria when the wife of the Marshall with the Marschallin, you know, Mrs. Marshall. When a young lover takes another—or when a young lover gives her away for a younger woman—and she has an incredible aria that was my favorite, wearing an incredible costume. You know, a woman hitting her forties and all that—and she being rejected by a young lover. And there is the aria, 'Ich bin ja doch,' the Marschallin. But I'm still the wife of a Marshall. Then she does her great aria looking at herself in the mirror. And you know, wonderful! *(Laughter)*

So the good dean took me to lunch at the faculty club, where I was still wondering when he was going to say I was accepted. Do I get some financial aid because I am alone. So then the lunch was finished and he said, 'Oh yeah, tomorrow morning at nine o'clock see my secretary at nine o'clock. *(Pounds on table)* You were accepted for a four year scholarship if it's good with you. And occasionally report in with me to talk about opera. *(Laugh)* I should have written a letter to Elizabeth Schwartzkopf, and thank her for that *(Laughter)*. I can even sing her aria in a falsetto. *(Laughter)*

Q: Oh, we'd love to hear that!

Kondor: Ich bin ja doch, the Marschallin!

(Laughter)

Kondor: So that was that. I studies political science with Hans Morgenthau and various people. And actually occasionally, I worked in his office to translate a few things. And I have to

tell you a little anecdote. There was a telephone there in his office. He said, 'If it rings, never answer it!' (*Pounds on table*) He didn't exactly tell me why. I said okay. Well, I find out later he was very often advising Kennedy on foreign policy issues. He was not formally on his staff, or something, but he was advising. I think it was around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. And anyway the old man was out in the toilet, and that stupid phone was ringing and finally I picked it up and said, 'Hello' and—oh yeah, the guy answered the phone said, 'This is the President.' I said, 'President of what?' And it was Kennedy! By that time the old man was coming, zipping it up, 'I told you don't answer that phone!' And, I talked to Kennedy—'The President of who---or what?' (*Laughter*) And then the President, with his Bostonian accent says, 'The President of the United States.' Oh Jesus. (*Laugh*) But anyway that was my length of conversation. The old man said.... (*Whispers and gesticulates scolding*)

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Kondor: But I had already started photography as a hobby in Austria. I don't exactly know when—it was just one of those things you pick up and then get more and more interested in it. When I came to Chicago, I saved up money to buy better cameras and everything. And then came the 1960's and all that, and then basically we are coming up to the year of 1968. By that time I was only a part-time student and I started to do more serious photography as a free-lance news photographer. In the spring, there were riots in Chicago when Martin Luther King was killed. This area here was burning—west Madison Avenue was in flames. There are some very ugly pictures of it. It was very dangerous.

One day I was still living in Hyde Park—and I was living with all this mess, and as I was walking around outside the campus at the Midway Park I noticed three little black boys about that height (*Gestures*) wandering around the park with a number of little paper American flags. That just so enchanted me, in all this hatred, and mess, and nonsense—smoke on the horizon and all that---these little three or four black boys—playing with an American flag. And with a long lens I started to follow them. I think I took about nine shots, and one of them—one shot is up like this (*Gestures*) and the rest are just looking up. Then I submitted a picture. At that time it was the first time I had seen *Life Magazine* had a contest, an annual photo contest. I got an honorable mention in it and was published by *Life Magazine*.

And then came—the whole spring was anti-war demonstrations. I photographed a lot of them. I sold a fair amount of pictures to some European publications. And then came the big event—the '68 convention. I started with the demonstrators in Lincoln Park. There's a wonderful picture of dope smoking. Even the CBS camera man had flowers in his ear---it was a big love-in. I think that was one demonstration that I think, the Daley administration—they misread that. Or the police, or the administration. They were out in Lincoln Park and they were having a great love fest. Which today, everybody takes it for normal. About eleven o'clock the police came, the park was closed. And the police came with the billy clubs and then everything—and the gas. Well, instead of these kids going home, they just marched down all the way in front of the Hilton Hotel—and camped out there, right in front of where all the delegate were.

Was it better to have them there than in Lincoln Park sleeping off their little pot smoke?
No. I don't think the Daley administration was ready for that—to handle that. And the

police, the Chicago police was even less. Later on what happened in front of the Hilton Hotel at night when the network cameras were put outside—they didn't realize what they were doing, really. Because all of the three networks had their cameras outside at the corner of Balboa and Michigan. Then they charged in with teargas and billy clubs into the demonstrators. And the three networks televised it live. And then, the people who understood what was happening were the demonstrators when they were chanting, 'The whole world is watching.' And the whole world watched, and the whole world didn't like what it saw, obviously. There was nothing pretty about it, either. I think the Daley administration misread that. I think it could have been handled differently. In their defense is that these kind of big, massive demonstrations were relatively new in American history. So on there was maybe on their defense that they didn't have too much experience with it.

And later on I learned that in the Army---the policeman were trained always two men to a car, and they were always acting as individuals, not as a unit. Not in a unit under command, like the Army does. And later on, I think as a result of it, many big city police departments received a kind of more formal unit training. Because whenever there were major demonstrations like the march on the Pentagon or something, they brought up the Federal troops to fix that. They didn't do anything, they just stood there—in large numbers. Nobody was killed, nobody was hurt. But the demonstrators wouldn't enter the Pentagon either. The Army is much better—the Army is trained for unit performance or fighting not for individuals running around with billy clubs in back alleys. So okay, that's a big difference. Well, I cannot say that's the same as the National Guard, because at Kent State, they shot. But then when I was in the Army, we used to say, National Guard was bad, because you know, fat weekend warriors. But when you had

regular federal troops, you had no problem, because you were trained as a unit. Not running around individually like a bunch of crazies. So that was that—and one thing that happens that leads to how I got involved, eventually in the Daley administration.

Because one afternoon, the demonstrators from in front of the Hilton Hotel—there was a General Morgan statue and there was a hill—there were wonderful pictures of that like an anthill of people—and then somebody decided, maybe Dick Gregory, he was involved. Or Greg Rubin¹, I don't remember some of these characters—they said, 'Let's march on the convention.' Down on Michigan Avenue and all that. And they started marching, very happily and all that. And by reaching 18th and Michigan there is an overpass, a railroad track or something, or road—I don't know what exactly. And then from a distance I see, not the police, but the Army. Army with armored personnel carriers and when I got closer, I got really frightened because there were loaded machine guns. And I said, 'Oh my God.' By that point I was looking for doorways to duck in if they start shooting. I thought that was the closest it came to really a massacre.

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And then out of nowhere a police car drives through the crowd like crazy and a guy jumps out, and I thought they were going to lynch him because the police were not exactly popular at that point. Then some guy who had this chicken thing, this braid—I don't know who he was, some officer gets up and starts to go ahead of the demonstrators, and at the top of his lungs starts shouting that you got to stop. He said, 'This is not a police matter anymore, those are Federal troops there. And they'll shoot—'

¹ Jerry Rubin was an American social activist and self-proclaimed yippie. Rubin was one of the anti-war demonstrators who was arrested, tried and convicted as one of the Chicago Eight in 1969.

they're ordered to shoot if you are to cross. Nobody will march on the convention, you have to understand that.' And he grabbed a couple of black guys, 'I'll lead you back to the front of the Hilton where nothing is going to happen to you and you'll be safe. I'll bring you. But you cannot go there.' I said, Jesus, this guy—at least one policeman has some brains here, you know? And the crowd—the mob—the demonstrators turned around and they followed him back to the front of the Hilton. He took them down there and he disappeared. Then when the whole thing was over, I never forgot this cop. I said now this was the one man with common sense. More than common sense—brilliant, actually. Almost heroic, really. And a week or so goes by and it still bothers me, who this guy is. And I photographed this whole sequence, you know, from a distance. A hundred shots at least.

And during that demonstration I met a *Tribune* photographer, Walter Kale. And I called him up at the *Tribune* and I told him the story and I said, 'How can I find out who this guy was, because if there was a hero that day, this guy was him.' And he said, 'Why don't you call up Frank Sullivan? He's the press secretary for the police department. He could help.' So I called up Frank Sullivan. And he said, 'What do you want?' So I tried to explain what I had, and to say who this guy was. And he said, 'Where are you? I will have a police car pick you up in five minutes.' So I said, 'Fine.' He said, 'Do you have the material you?' So I bring the stuff. And a minute later he calls somebody—that was Deputy Superintendent James Rochford, the second man in command of the Chicago Police Department. Well, five minutes later we are up in his office, and I lay out all the photographs, and he said, 'This is incredible.' He said, 'I even remember you. You were right in front of my face always.' I said, 'Exactly.' He said, 'You are a man of some common sense.' Could I make prints of that? I said, 'Sure, because that's what I do, and

all that.' Then I went to Frank Sullivan telling me that, 'You know there were twenty-four hundred newsmen that are credited to the Chicago convention, but not a single one came up with anything to show that was favorable for our side. You're the only one.' (*Laughs*) Well I said, 'I didn't know. That was not my intention either.' I said, 'Enough of your police were pigs, to be honest. But this guy wasn't, obviously.'

So Frank Sullivan took me to lunch and was asking me what I'm doing and somehow I said, 'I'm getting into this freelance business.' And he said, 'Why don't you work for the city?' I said, 'For what?' He said, 'To photograph.' So the man at that time was Earle Bush, the man who was Daley's press secretary. He said, 'I have to introduce you to him. The mayor doesn't have a photographer.' He said, 'They always get the police department or the fire department to send somebody when they need something to be photographed. Its—the whole system is stupid.' He said, 'You're talented—and so would you meet Earle Bush?' And I said, yeah, it's a good idea, Frank.'

And to make a long story short, in the end nothing happened because Earl Bush got involved too much maybe in a lot of other things, God knows what---this is the Earle Bush who up there, when on the West side was burning in the aftermath of the Martin Luther King situation, when Daley said the shoot to kill order, Earl Bush explained it to the press, 'Print what he means, not what he says.' Which is very logical if you think about it. (*Laughs*) And I think he made some attempts, and anyway it didn't work out. I remember tried to do anything to get some job as a newspaper, a magazine, a wire service, anything—to go to Vietnam to photograph the war. But I was not successful, and I get really mad. And then I'm in front of an Army recruiting office, and I joined the Army. I must have been really crazy.

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I joined the goddamn U.S. Army and they said well, they cannot guarantee I would be a photographer, but well I wasn't either. So I went to Fort Leavenworth for basic training and Fort Gordon, Georgia for airborne infantry training. And then one day I got my little order that—go to Vietnam as an infantry man. And that was sort of interesting. A lot of the movies that show brutal, sadistic Army sergeants handling training—well, I didn't see any of it. Actually, to this day I'm very impressed by that time how terribly professional the U.S. Army was, and their training procedures. Number one, all these drill instructors were selected from very stable and combat-trained sergeants. And they went through very serious psychological testing. Later on I find out the Harvard School of Psychiatry designed many of these programs for them. Actually, I was very impressed by their professionalism. Falling asleep in the heat or from the cold they said—they almost beg you—stay awake. Learn what we are teaching you here because you are young and you are going to go to Vietnam, and this knowledge—what you get here—might save your life. So, stay awake.

And actually, later on in Vietnam I run into some of these old sergeants. By that time, I was a combat veteran so we had a good Scotch together, and told war stories. And it was very interesting, the first morning in Fort Gordon, Georgia. A gigantic, six foot-five black sergeant, like a tall, rough beefmeat or something with a Smokey the Bear hat. And her sounded like this (*Imitates sergeant's voice*) with upper respiratory rasp because of all the shouting they did. (*Imitates sergeant's voice*) 'Gentlemen, good morning gentlemen. I call you gentlemen because the U.S. Congress, the U. S. government requires me to call you gentlemen. Huh-huh-huh-huh. Green, are you a

gentlemen?' You're not!' *(Laugh)* God, what characters! *(Imitates Sergeant's voice)*

'Gentlemen, you are here to be trained as U.S. infantrymen. Gentlemen, the U.S. infantryman is the best infantrymen in the whole world, you understand. But you, of course, are not that yet. But first we will have to teach you. But in two months, those who survive the training—one sunny morning you will be wearing khakis—and you will, by strange metamorphosis like the monarch butterfly....' I never forgot that stupid phrase. Like a strange a metamorphosis like a monarch butterfly '.... from lousy shit-head recruits you become U.S. Army infantrymen. And gentlemen, that morning, I will salute you. And the general will be coming over with the base commander and a big Army band. And they will salute you.' And he did. And everyone came down the line, 'Sir, take care.' They were good. I ended up in Vietnam. And there I ended up in—what is it— called Camh Ran Bay, the first stop. The next morning they put us in the airplane to go up to Chu Lai, up country close to the DMZ where the Americal Division was located, and I guess they assigned me there.

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As the airplane comes in I could see black smoke everywhere in a couple of places. So I ask one of the pilots—not pilots, one of the Air Force guys, I said, 'Jesus, was the base hit by the enemy tonight or something?' He says, 'Oh, no they're burning shit.' It's very simple. When you have thousands and tens of thousands of people in one place, you have to get rid of that. So the Army's idea way of doing it was to put some kerosene on it and burn it. But from the airplane it looked like it was the end of the Second World War and the German Luftwaffe was just bombing the place. They were burning shit. So we landed, and we ended up in a place called the Americal Division Combat Center for a

one week indoctrination in Vietnam, and some training and all that. And two days goes by and an order to get my order to an infantry company to the Eleventh Brigade. Then I really get nervous because I ask the sergeant, because I don't know why twenty of us were called to go to the one company. Which meant that company must have taken some very heavy casualty that they needed that much replacement all at once. By that time I was a little cleverer then.

But I didn't end up there because its, you know—deus ex machina, divine intervention from the sky again—a guy comes in a jeep, and gets out and starts taking pictures and all that—and again little things, you know? I could have went to sleep, but no I went up to the guy. 'Who are you man, you're taking pictures?' He said, 'Oh, I'm from the Division Information Office.' He said, 'I'm really a writer, but I have to take photographs, too because we don't have anybody really in our division who even knows how to use the camera so I double as the photographer.' I told the guy, 'But I'm a photographer. And I signed up for the Army.' And we started talking. The man said, 'You're not shitting me, man?' I said, 'No, of course not.' He said, 'You're really? Do you work for some newspaper or something?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'We have to come up with something.' It was like I have to package you somehow. He said, 'I'm leaving the division and going back stateside in about two weeks. And actually the truth is we don't have anybody. And if you're really half as good as you say-' I said, 'I am.' And he said, 'Listen, could you come up with some story—some professional background?'

And I thought if I lie and say I work for the *Chicago Tribune*, or *Sun-Times* or *Time* magazine, they can check it very easily. I said what can I come up with—Daley. It would be a little bit tricky for them to check out. So I said, 'I was Mayor Daley's photographer

in Chicago.' I was offered the job and the guy said, 'That's wonderful.' Now this is '69. The Army loved Daley. Beat up on the hippies and all that. And the guy gives me that thing—he said, 'The Informational Officer is a National Guard Major, who thinks that he's really a soldier. He's really a damn chicken-shit. But you know what National Guard is?' I said, 'Yes, I know and all that.' He said, ' Now listen, get yourself cleaned up really good, have your story ready, I'll drive you up to Division, I introduce you to the Major that finally we find a top-notch photographer for the Division. You salute like you are back in Fort Bragg--yessir, no sir. The guy is an asshole but he likes all this military crap.'

And I did exactly that. And we said, 'I work for Daley. And he said, 'What kind of a man is Daley?' And I said, 'Sir, he is really a tough mayor,' and (*Laugh*)—I lied like a rug. He said, 'Sergeant said we don't really have anybody here and you are infantry trained. Airborne.' I said, 'Yes sir.' He said, 'And you are really willing to go out in combat?' I said, 'That was why I really signed up for the Army.' And that was true. That was not a lie. I was really stupid, I guess. So he said, 'Okay. Have you already received orders? I said, Eleventh Brigade.' He said, 'Woo—no problem. He said, Sergeant Clyde or whatever his name was, will take care of you. He will put you in the hootch where you guys are. He said, 'Don't go anywhere. If there are orders and the MP's get you, you are in trouble.' He said, 'By tonight I'll have your orders changed.'

And the next morning, he was good to his word. I had new orders I was assigned to the Information Offices combat photographer of Americal Division. And that started, actually the nine happiest months of my life. Because I really enjoyed that—that's what I wanted to go to Vietnam for. And I went out with units. And I—I kind of created a little legend in a newspaper we put up. There was a black guy who edited the paper. I think

he was kind of a hippie in disguise. Because at first I got a by-line, Laszlo Kondor, Americal IO, you know, that one. Eventually it was like that—I had a by-line that big (*Gestures*) and then the major and the general stopped that-- No, no the general's name should be painted larger after all. But I have this tear sheet* still—it's fun. But I enjoyed that—that's what I wanted to do. And that's what I did.

A problem came up—I was supposed to be there for a year. And I got into a conflict. I suppose sometimes if you're successful at something you get enough detractors who would like to kind of choke you in a glass of water if they could or something. So there was this little conspiracy so that I cannot go out anymore. More actually, I dug my own grave because I think I was getting a little bit too big for my own britches. They send me up a couple of days to a unit, but I thought there it was interesting and there was more to the story, plus they were nice guys—I stayed for another week or so. Which is probably not a nice thing to do in the Army. So they clip my wings, which was the nastiest thing they could do to me because I was really stupid. Most people did everything they could do to avoid combat, and I wanted out there. So I cannot go out anymore. I was not a very happy camper about that, and I said how the hell can I get out of this? In a way I'm responsible, I dug my own grave, but I still don't like to be buried alive. And by that time I was really pretty saavy to the way the Army really works.

I don't know if you read Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, but there is a great character there—ex PFC Wintergreen, who is not a general, but an ex PFC Wintergreen who runs the Army, or the Eighth Air Force. Because the company's clerks—or the unit clerks have awesome power. You know, whose paper they push forward, whose they lose. And when the Division Chief of Staff has to sign two hundred orders a day, he reads the first

three or four. They rest of them he just signs automatically. Every ex PFC Wintergreen knows that exactly. I met one of these guys and I was crying on his shoulder about my ill fate and all that. And he said, 'Oh man, this is nothing! You want to get out of the stupid division?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Well, I cannot send you back to the States because you can only be sent back within the Pacific Ocean Command. You are assigned in the Pacific. I said, 'Where would you send me?'

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He said, 'How about Hawaii? I said, 'Nice.' He said, 'But well it's not so easy. It's going to cost you a case of Scotch. I said, 'No big deal.' At the PX a bottle of Scotch was a dollar, so a case was twenty bucks or something. I said, 'Man, you got it!' And he said, 'Have you been to Saigon?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Well how about if I sign you an order to Hawaii—to the U.S. Army Hawaii command, but would two weeks be enough for you in Saigon? But you have to have a hotel room.' I said, 'No, I have a little money saved up.' So I went down to Saigon. I said goodbye to the Division, you know, with a heavy heart and all that.

By that time I became a little bit crooked. I learned the Army's way, okay? It's called the khaki mafia. But this guy he was—he was an ex PFC (private first class) Wintergreen, for sure. And so I get down to Saigon, I think I stayed three weeks. But he did one thing wonderful—an open order. But after three weeks I run out of money so I say I better go to the Than So Nhut Air Force Base. I presented my papers to the MP's—the military police. And they look at it and they smile. 'How much did you pay for this order?' They said, 'This is the flying carpet, man.' *(Laugh)* It was. It was. But one thing—something happened in between. I was wandering out in a field and I saw some tanks and other

personnel carriers. And one of them—on the top of it---had the flag of Chicago. The Chicago flag, with the stars on it. I took a couple of frames of it and developed the film and I sent it—I kept in touch with Frank Sullivan—I sent it to him. I said, hey look at this! And actually he wrote back that he forwarded to Colonel Riley—Jack Riley, the Mayor’s Special Events Director because he was always mailed Chicago flags to G.I.s who were Chicagoans, or something. I get a letter from Colonel Riley, do I know the name of this guy. On top of a tank I just drove by there. I didn’t get out there to ask, is it Private Kowalski or something? But anyway, I kept in touch and then I went back to—I ended up in Hawaii, and that was really—they assigned me to the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division as a writer. Why as a photographer did they want to make a writer of me, I don’t know. By then I ran across in Vietnam in my photographic activities, an Army special organization called DASPO, Department of Army Special Photographic Office, which was straight out of the Pentagon, and I knew that they had a detachment in Hawaii.

So I just went into the IO or U.S. Army Information Office, or the public relations office because I was used to that activity and I asked them, ‘Where is the DASPO office? And they were lovely people, really helpful and they said, ‘These are Schofield Barracks, no they’re down in Fort Shafter, the U.S. Army Pacific Command headquarters. They said, ‘Go down there. I’ll help drive you down. We can wait an hour, we drive there anyway.’ So they took me down and what I did is I brought a nice little portfolio of my work, I marched right into the DASPO Office. And there was a tall sergeant at the desk, and I check in and he said, ‘How can I help you?’ And I said, ‘I’m here applying for a job.’ He said, ‘What do you mean?’ I said, ‘I’m a combat photographer, here is all of my stuff from Vietnam and I heard about you guys. And you know I have an order to be a writer to the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division in the Schofield Barracks. I’m not a writer, but I’m a

very good photographer.’ And he looks at the stuff and says, ‘Hey, wait a minute!’ Major Dayland was the commanding officer. And he goes in and he talks to him for a few minutes and then he calls me in and says, ‘Let me look at this stuff.’ He said, ‘Holy shit, you are good!’ And he said, ‘Where are you assigned? Do you have orders?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Oh, no problem.’ He said, ‘Don’t disappear. Don’t let the MP’s catch you. In twenty four hours we’ll assign you here.’ And they did. And then I stayed there until the rest of my service.

Then I went back to Vietnam and to Korea and to all that pacific region area. It was very nice. By that time, we were in Saigon we lived in in that nice French villa with gardeners and cooks and maids and everything. It was deluxe. And we had a very, very handsome per diem, and everything. And with that, it was a nice gentleman’s way to fight a war. About that point, the problem with that was in a way it was very nice, but kind of bad, too, because when you are out in a combat area all the time you accept that this is it. But when you are in a luxury French villa but then at least once a week you have to for three days go back into that crap—you are a little schizophrenic. It kind of takes a little more of a toll out of you than to be all of the time out in the crap. Being in the crap, and deluxe and back and forth—it was kind of tough. It wears on you a little bit. And so I served out my time there.

And one more little thing—when I left the Americal Division, very simply I put on my khakis and few of the ribbons and all that. And in the U.S. Army, I don’t know if you’ve seen American officers or generals always on top of every medal they have, there is on a blue background, a rifle. It’s called a Combat Infantry Badge. Or the CIB. It was established by President Roosevelt halfway through the Second World War because

many of the guys who were in the field, really in the battlefield as infantrymen they came back—all the Chaplin's assistants and truck drivers and god knows what else—and dental technicians and rabbi assistants—told war stories about what they did in the war, and they never got near to it. And the infantrymen were put in the same category.

So the President, Roosevelt, established a distinction mark for infantrymen who served in combat. And this is something that is very special in the Army. It sort of separates the men from the boys really. I didn't get it. I was trained as an infantryman, but I was not formally assigned to a unit. When I left the division I was waiting for my airplane to Saigon, and some of the guys from the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol who I was out very often with, they came by to pick up somebody. They come up and look at me and say, 'Where is your CIB?' I said, 'Well, I'm not entitled, you know.' They said, 'But you were trained infantry.' But I said, 'Yes, but I never was assigned to an infantry unit for up to ninety days.' It was one of these bureaucratic things which makes sense in a way, I suppose. They said, 'Bullshit, man! No way!' So they make a couple of radio calls and all that, and pretty soon all the twelve guys end up there, they call formation, and they put that CIB on me. I'll tell you something—it means more to me than if an official or if a general would have put it on me. Because these are the people who did it—who I served with. The miniature of the CIB medal I still wear it on my jacket lapel. Because I was decorated by my own folks. Not by some bureaucratic nonsense.

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So, and then you know, and then my Army days kind of wind down, slowly. And then I was coming home, and I was vaguely in touch with Sullivan although I had no intentions to work for the city of Chicago. I put out resumes and everything to every newspaper

and wire service and God knows what. Well, you don't get a job that fast. Actually it was a year later, I was already in Chicago when I got a letter from the editor—the photo editor—of the *Baltimore Sun*. And almost a couple of weeks later from the *Boston Globe*—we have an opening, a year later.

So I came down to Chicago to look around for the local papers, and called up Sullivan. He said, 'Now this time around, now you are a damn war hero and all, you got to work for the city. Now you got even more experience and everything.' And he brought me down to Earl the Pearl Bush. Well it took a month or so. Well, there was no job like that that ever existed basically, okay? Sullivan, he had a good PR sense, and he said there should be a job like that. Here is one of the biggest mayors in America. He is the only one who doesn't have his own photographer. But it didn't go that easy. But anyway, they got something together. You know Mike Royko and all the people said that Chicago, the Daley Machine works like a well-oiled Swiss clock or something. No. No. Earle Bush snuck me into the payroll somehow—the payroll of the Department of Public Works. And they put me down into the office of the Public Works.

Then both Sullivan—Sullivan by that time was already in City Hall, not as a pressman, but as one of the Mayor's Administrative Assistants. But he was busy with his own miseries, with his new job. Earl the Pearl Bush was a good man, but a discombobulated man. He was always two hours behind his life, I think. A strange man. Brilliant, but weird in some ways. So I was sort of lost there, and I was forgotten. I get a desk, I get a paycheck. I was couple of floors below the Mayor's office with a bunch of not very pleasant people. They didn't know what to do with me. And I didn't know what to do with myself either. You know the great well-oiled Daley Machine, that's how it

operated. They are both wrong. There's no job. I have to create one. And then, the first time I march up to Colonel Riley's office and introduce myself. Again, in a very military way, he is an old Colonel from—I don't know if it was an honorary title or not, but he took it very seriously. And I was not—I tell him what I am and what I am supposed to do. And he said, 'It's about time that somebody's here that's reliable and can do something that we need for those special events. We have to be photographed, and all the staff. And yes!' And the secretary, some very nice Puerto Rican woman, Elsie—he said, 'Elsie, you call him whenever we need him.' Fine. And I did, and in that way it was the first time I got into the Mayor's Office. Then coming out, Daley's principal secretary Kay Spear kind of stopped me, 'Who are you?' So I tried to explain who I am. She said, 'Oh. Okay, good! Well, do you have a telephone number and all that?' I said, 'Yeah.' She said, 'I will need you too for things! Because I didn't like that for years I called the Police Department and the Fire Department and all that.' And that was Kay Spear.

And by that time I knew from the Army and all that, you make friends with the executive secretary and you end up on the right side—half the battle is won. And then there was Kay Quinlan the other one, who was a sweet little person, a woman. And then I started to kind of expect, because nobody had bought me any camera—I used the cameras I purchased in Vietnam—in fact I used that for about three years before anybody thought—asked me what cameras I was using and whose is it. And then to send out the film to process. So this is how the well-oiled Daley Machine was working. Mike Royko said that was everything was precise and was working—no. At least not in my case, okay? But it was getting better and better. Where should I take it from there? Actually I did a lot of photography for the Department of Public Works because to go out on some things—I enjoyed doing that. When I had nothing to do with the Mayor's office, really it

was not a full time job at that point. So I actually did a lot of work for them. But there was a nasty bunch of people there. Sometimes when I was film-processing, or some of my contact sheets and film came back, sometimes it was lost—sometimes for days. Oh, they just mislaid it. And they caused me some times embarrassment with Kay Spear. One time I was very sick for almost a week and I sent some film out and so nothing happened. I told Ross Ehlert photo lab on Ohio Street not to deliver the film to the office in the City Hall, but to my apartment. But these god folks in the City Hall, they jumped on it. That I had some private work, or something—that I was stealing something from the city.

And I—couple of days later I came back, I got over my flu or whatever I had, I get pulled down to Public Works from someone who was Tom Donovan, who was the Chief of Public Works assistant or something—and was virtually accused of theft. And she said, ‘Can she see the materiel that was sent to out to my house?’ I said, ‘I would love to. Here. I have nothing to hide.’ She said, ‘It was nothing personal, I just wanted to see what you have here.’ I said, ‘Of course. If you would have started the conversation like that I would have told you, but you did this.’ She said, ‘But why did you have it delivered to your thing?’ I told them because they were screwing me behind my back. Now I didn’t want to lose that stuff. She said, ‘Okay, thanks.’ I hope they gave a good chew-out to those bums because I should have told them they deserved it. And then—oh and then there was another thing. There is City Hall and then some of these good folks in Public Works still to do the revenge better, they transferred me to the 320 North Clark Street—some office across the river. And barely a week goes by, and I get a call from Kay Spear, be here immediately. And I arrived a good half an hour later or something. And she chews me out, ‘Why, why are you so late?’ I said, ‘They transferred me to 320

North Clark.’ ‘Why?’ she said. I said, ‘I don’t know. You ask them, Kay.’ Well she did. She said, ‘Don’t go back there. Go back to—we have a new office for you. Don’t even go back there. You are in here where I can reach you. I guess nobody argued with her. And then you go through any large organization, I guess this happens. You know, your well-wishers or something. And it’s gotten better. And Sullivan was still—we come to that picture.

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By that time I’m there for half a year, close to a year and I actually have a job. One day I went down to Tom Donovan, the Mayor’s patronage chief. Because one day, people had been asking me at that point, ‘Who sponsored you?’ I didn’t even know what that meant. During the patronage, you know what ward, what committeeman—I don’t know. And I didn’t know, so I went up to Tom and said, ‘Tom, people are asking me who sponsored me—so who sponsored me?’ He looked at me and said, ‘Just tell them, the Mayor.’ Whoa—that was a conversation stopper, thank God. *(Laugh)* Because I didn’t know what the hell—who sponsored me.

So, and then so we come to the thing—and Sullivan decided the Mayor uses a portrait that is handed out to everybody and all the publications that is like fifteen years old. And it was grotesquely ugly fifteen years ago, and it is totally out of date. He said, ‘You do a portrait of the old man.’ I said, ‘No problem. Give me about half an hour or something with him.’ And he said, ‘Oh—you will never get it!’ I said, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘It wasn’t his type of thing—he wouldn’t think of that.’ He said, ‘The man has no vanity for things like that. They are a total unnecessary expense or something like that.’ So I tried to follow him to various things and all that. Nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing. And

then I came up with the idea that maybe the best way is, because I covered all his press conferences, is to do it there. Because he was moving like an electric eel at those times it was impossible to get something that was usable. And I tried to think about how to do it, and how to do it. And I said to myself, he was at the podium and whenever I shot up, I just saw the fatness of him—not a good angle for anybody. And so I figured out way back where the TV cameras are—on a very good strong tripod, I put on my Nikon—my motorized Nikon with a three hundred millimeter lens would be the length to focus just on his head and shoulder kind of thing.

And I did press conference after press conference and I showed these contacts sheets, and it was only half of it or not that—and not getting, not getting anywhere somehow. Just him so being animated all time. Then one day, it was a pretty rough press conference. I don't know what they were grilling him on—what issue—but it was a rough press conference. Then he was about to leave and some of the guys—the old-timers who covered him, they were pretty good about it, to break the ice a little bit, after a tough grilling.

And at that point, Jay McMillan, who was later Jane Byrne's husband was a reporter for the *Daily News*, tosses the Mayor one of these kind of a break the ice questions. 'Mr. Mayor, Alderman Singer from the Forty Second Ward has been complaining bitterly about dog doo-doo's on the street. What are you going to do about it?' And the Mayor was almost gone, and he came back and went up there, 'Gee, they are not birds, we cannot put them in cages!' And he left. Thank God for motorized cameras, because I just pushed it like a machine gun. I said, 'There is the shot!' I send it out immediately to have it developed and to get contact sheets back—and large contact sheets. And I

immediately go to the last six frames—its' got to be there! If it's not there—and then on the second frame, there was the shot. I immediately send it out to the Ross Ehlert to make it a sixteen by twenty enlargement and make it two of them, actually. They said, 'When do you want it back?' I said, 'An hour!' Oh, I knew I had it. That was victory! And it was almost at closing time, City Hall. And I march up to the Mayor's office, his assistants and to Frank Sullivan, and put it onto his desk and uncovered it. And he jumped up and said, 'Holey-Moley! You got!' (*Laugh*) He said, 'That's it!' But it's another thing, how to make it the official portrait.

Well the way to make it an official portrait was to bring it up to Kay Spear. And Kay Spear looked at it and said, 'Thank God—it's about time! She said print five hundred eight by tens, please. By tomorrow.' And I was a little facetious, I said, 'And what do we do with the old ones?' She said, 'Toss it in the garbage.' (*Laugh*) So Frank Sullivan and I and Kay Spear decided. The Mayor never commented on it. Never thanked me for it. Never said a word about it. It was sent out and it was used for everything. From there on out—for campaigns and gigantic blowups and everything. Nobody in his family made a comment about it.

When he died, in the Nativity of Our Lord Church—when all of us on the staff went through to express our condolences to the family and finally I get to Mrs. Daley—and for the funeral that picture was also printed up. On the flip side of it—I think I have a copy of it at home—was a prayer, his favorite prayer from St. Francis. That was handed out at the funeral. And that was the first and only time Mrs. Daley in that situation made a comment, 'You really captured him. We never thanked you.' And that was that. And this is how the portrait—so this is so much for the well-oiled machine. The Mayor goes out

to Richard Avedon or Victor Skrebneski for a portrait session, but no—this is how it happened. Believe me, exactly like that.

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And the other thing is—now here is another picture when I went up to the Folk Fair (*Refers to photography in Folk Fair file*) and that was funny, I was in and out of his office virtually every day, but he sort of never acknowledged my presence. Then we were out in the Folk Fair (*Looks at photograph in Folk Fair file*)—yes, this will kind of help you to understand. Going by the Folk Fair at the Navy Pier, photographing him with people and all that—I was lagging behind or something. Then he turns to one of his body guards and says, ‘Get Ludwig.’ Then he turns back to the other body guard, ‘Get Ludwig.’ And the other body guard turns to me and says, ‘Get Ludwig.’ Nobody knew who Ludwig was. Finally Daley, kind of impatient comes back and grabs me, ‘Ludwig, come take pictures!’ I became Ludwig. He never learned my name. He called me Ludwig for four years—or five years almost. The body guards started to call me Ludwig and I get really mad at them and I said, ‘The old man can do it. You guys cannot!’ So I became Ludwig. Frank Sullivan was laughing, ‘He knows how to say Seamus O’Hennessey, but not Laszlo.’ So much for the Irish!

Laughter

Q: I think it might be a good time to take a break right now, and maybe begin thinking about your relationship with the city of Chicago.

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I’d love to hear a little more about that.

Kondor: I'm glad you didn't ask me any political thing because I was not on the political side of his existence. I was sort of the court painter, or court jester or something, you know? And that was actually a little bit difficult to be surrounded by a sea of Irishmen and all that. And with my nice Hungarian accent. I thought should I tried to develop some phony Irish accent? Then I said, 'No, I am an outsider here, and I exist on it.' And it worked. They accepted me. I was the outsider. The artist. *(Laugh)* And to first to develop this job—and then sort of an identity. And it worked—it worked. Ludwig did his stuff.

Q: That's a perfect place to stop, just for now.

End of Part I

**Laszlo Kondor Part 2
Oral History Interview
Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections
University of Illinois at Chicago
6 November 2013
Interviewed by Marie Scatena**

Final

Q: Thank you again for those beautiful stories. We're going to start up again. So Laszlo I'd like to start with your background as a photographer, and go back to how you started and what kinds of subjects draw you.

Kondor: Okay. Well actually my interest in photography goes all the way back to Austria. Even in the high school years I started in a very beginning way, and I got interested in it more and more, bought better cameras, and then I took informal courses in photography, but

as far as I'm concerned the greatest photographers never went to photo school.

Because I think most photo schools are extremely good at ruining any talent there is—they channel them into something useless. So no—I never was interested in landscape or photographing things, items. My fascination was always people, because people are always changing constantly—their moods. So photographing people in action, that was always my great interest.

And I developed it slowly, and the way my technique of learning is to be very critical of your own work. And before all this digital, when you developed a roll of film of thirty-six exposures, you made a contact sheet where you see a progression of negatives when photograph something. I look to be very, very critical—brutal on myself. I had seen something. I started photographing because usually I had an interest in what was happening. I started to follow, to look at the frames; one, two, three, four, five, six. There's nothing! It's like it was lost. I had seen something, but I didn't catch it. I lost it.

And it went on for months and months. I'd go to the contact sheets and say, 'What had I seen?' And then I started to tell myself—I really have to time myself. In an exchange of two people on a street corner—now this is just two people running into each other, shaking hands or talking; every human exchange is a mini drama. It has a first act, a second act, and a highlight—and then it peters out. It is to—time yourself—see what's happening. Try to follow the development of the action to let it speak—that's where the shot is. If you do it too soon, you don't have it. When they are waving goodbye to each other, it's gone. And every little drama—try to get the peak. In whatever situation there is. And a contact sheet was a great tool to do that. You could follow frame to frame what happened—and see how exactly you missed it.

And so I took a process, quite a long process, and I used a lot of film doing it. But it was a good school, and I was very highly critical task master or teacher—because I had to. I didn't need anyone looking over my shoulder—I just had results. If it was not there, it was not there. You just have to be honest with that. And the photo I did for Life Magazine of the three little black boys and an American flag. I was just so proud of that because I was just really on the way home—I think I had just six frames left on a thirty six frame exposure. They caught my eyes and I said to myself, now this is a nice subject. With the racially loaded climate where part of the city is burning, and look at these three little black boys totally innocently holding the American flag that they are always waving on the street or singing to it. I said, 'What a beautiful sight.' So I started to follow them. I only took six exposures.

And it was there—and his face and the light hit it just right. In a studio you could not have lit it up better. And that's what I shot. And then I just went home. And I knew it. That's an enormous satisfaction is when you know you got it—because you took the shot exactly when you had to. And that ran in Life Magazine, and it was in many exhibits. So that's the trick. And that's what really fascinated me—photographing people. Probably, to tell you honestly—the photographs that I did for Daley is not the highlight—I don't consider the highlight of my career. Photographically, I consider the best work I ever did was that nine months I did with the Americal Division. I was good. I loved the subject and I was young and energetic. And that was the peak of my career—that nine months with the Americal Division.

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The reason is partially because I photographed the world differently was because I was an insider—I was a soldier myself. Some of my exhibits for the Vietnam thing (exhibition), I called, 'A Soldier's Story.' I photographed the life of a soldier in combat. Not for a newspaper, or a headline or something. I was on the inside. And I learned how to photograph inside a helicopter with a wide-angle lens—you know people from that distance. Because I wore the same uniform—I was as filthy as they were—they never even noticed me. Okay, that was my trick, in a way. And the thing is, we say how can you really photograph war?

Later when, I was with DASPO when I was with the Army Special Photographic Office, and I was in Saigon it was a wonderful thing in the evenings, in the Continental, old French colonial hotel with a big pond in their garden. And to go out there and drink—and a lot the foreign correspondents gathered there in the evenings for watering from buckets full of gin and tonics and beer. And one of them was Larry Burrough, an Englishman from Life Magazine who died in Khe Sanh a year later, and Horst Faas from A.P.—Pulitzer Prize twice; one from Dacca, Bangladesh and one from Vietnam, and others who called themselves photographers. And sometimes we'd talk shop. People would say 'How was your day? Ah, crap. We were down in Mi Lai and nothing really happened—a total waste of two days.' But then there were the great events. And the best kind of description I have is that to photograph war you cannot photograph flying bullets or machines. You can do it back in Fort Bragg or Fort Louis if you just want to photograph equipment, but you don't have to do anywhere.

So what do you photograph? You photograph people, in situation, basically. But that's really the tricky part. And I don't know if it was Robert Capa who said, 'If you're not

close enough, you're not good enough. You have to be there.' But he never said why. And Horst Faas, this big German with his two Pulitzer Prizes explained it to me much, much better. He said, 'A human face is like a rubber ball. Under pressure it gives. You want to photograph a soldier, or that pilot or something in that under pressure. What you really see is you take an eighteen year old infantry man smiling, friendly guy. He is in combat for an hour, or a couple of hours and he doesn't look like he is eighteen years old, he looks more like he's forty-five. The sunken eyes—that total change. And if you can capture that—that's the story. And an hour later—if you arrive a couple of hours later you arrive and he's back there shaving and smiling. The rubber ball under pressure gives, and when the pressure is off—it pops out—it goes back to normal. That's what you have to capture. The ball that gives.

And there is something even more interesting, and then that rubber ball under incredible pressure for whatever psychological reason for that individual, never pops back. Those ones end up in VA hospitals for many years—collapsed internally because they could not deal with it. The ball did not pop back anymore. Yes, that happens. So you want to see that. And there was another thing, too during the Korean War David Douglass Duncan who was a Marine from the Second World War, and he photographed the Korean War. He has one very, very famous photograph of the GI with the filthy face and the stare. He calls it, 'The Ten Thousand Yard Stare.' And when you see an eighteen year old look like a forty-five year old under this pressure, that's the story, really. That's what war does.

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Not just bullets, or explosions or something. You know, that famous photograph of Vietnam of that little girl in Vietnam running with the Napalm burning on her back and the shriek. You can almost hear her. That's what you get—a photograph. And that's what you time yourself for. And you have to be close enough to do it. When I went to a place—I didn't have a very, very nice story—I missed the whole combat situation because I flew in, and instead of getting the shot I just missed the whole thing so I started photographing how they shaved, how they cleaned their weapons, how they picked their toes—how they played cards, and were laughing. I photographed the aftermath of combat. Which is almost as interesting. It made a very nice story—two pages layouts and everything. And I have a great empathy for them that I think was important, too—I was one of them. And that was important—I didn't look down on them. I was filthy and grimy, I was among them.

And that made it easier. They didn't bother to look at me. And I sometimes went to some unit and some idiot little second lieutenant who just arrived to Vietnam a week ago or something said, 'Why are you doing that because you don't know anything about combat?' And usually I put no insignia on my thing (uniform)—I wanted to be as rag-tag as possible. But then I put on my parachute wings and I said, 'Lieutenant, I beg your pardon sir, but you are full of shit.' And then some guy comes in and says, 'Hey Kondor, you're up again?' And then the Lieutenant says, 'You guys know each other?' And he says, 'Oh yeah, he comes out with us often.' (Laugh) A young lieutenant one week in the war. My wife does warned me not to use dirty words for the interview—we are among civilized people. (Laughter) And later on, it was interesting when finally went in the

office and Frank Sullivan came and I finally actually moved into the press office, and we had a good relationship with everybody there--Kay Spear and everybody. So I finally had a job after almost a year. So this is the Mayor's office—so whenever we picked up the phone, 'This is the Mayor's office.'

Break for Phone Call. Recording resumed mid response.

Kondor: And his wife Maggie.

Q: So you were closest to Richie?

Kondor: Yes, I probably knew him the best of all of them. I knew all of them, but I knew Ritchie probably the best. And I really loved his wife Maggie, she was really a wonderful woman. Very easy-going and very gracious. Okay, where were we?

Q: We were talking about your transition from being photographer in combat--

Kondor: Oh, yeah, I was in the Mayor's office.

Q: Yeah, into the Mayor's Office....

Kondor: So here I probably have to make a confession. I find out you answer the telephone and say, 'This is the Mayor's office,' and say, this is from the Mayor or somebody, you get respect as if you were somebody, 'Yes, sir.' The magic words of the 'Mayor's office' and all that. Don't worry, I never took anything, I never did anything crooked but now here's the confession—which was also good for the city. When I find out the Sir George Solti

and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was rehearsing one afternoon, The Mayor was in New York or something. I call up the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and introduce myself, Laszlo Kondor from the Mayor's office, would it be possible for me to photograph the orchestra and the maestro in rehearsal? Yes, of course sir. I never get no. So now there I misused the magic words 'the Mayor's office.'

00:15:05

Kondor: And I did it with Pavarotti, Baryshnikov and a couple of people. And actually some of these photos the city used in publications, so okay? This is a secret between us two. *(Laugh)* So that was my only crookedness working in the Mayor's office. I let the magic words open a few doors for me so that I can photograph really exciting folks! And I did some wonderful work with on Solti. And then when I photographed Pavarotti, he invited me to the Italian Village to eat with him. *(Laugh)* That was awesome to see him eat. Pavarotti—you know the Italian tenor—a big, fat man. I mean—pasta, spaghetti like that *(Gestures)* would feed a family of six for a month almost. He was a lovely man, actually. He was like a big boy, a big teddy bear, young boy. I remember once he was in one of the records stores, he was autographing some records, and it was winter and there were a lot of people getting in line to get his autograph, and then closing time came and there were still a lot of people out there. And the manager said, 'Okay Senor Pavarotti, would you like to say we are closed?' And he said, 'No there are still fifty people out there. No, we'll sign records for all of them. We'll stay.' Well then he said, 'Maestro, go for it!' He was a big boy—a wonderful man. What at talent! So that was my—I confess to you my sole crookedness. I don't think it was so terrible.

Q: So did you spend a lot of time on the fifth floor?

Kondor: Yes, I'll tell you something that really worked. I photographed him as I said, very often in his office. Almost as much as on the outside—on the road. So basically, the system developed; there were usually two people who called me for a photo assignment, maybe three. One was Colonel Riley for some special events, sometimes even private things like color slides in the Hilton for the birthday party for the Mayor, or his son's wedding that was a totally private affair. But those were pretty rare. Most of the things, photographing all these presidents who were coming, those usually came from Colonel Riley, because he was the organizer for all the special events. But anybody who came to see him in his office that usually was handled by Kay Spear. But then going out, that usually came from Frank Sullivan because we needed stuff for the neighborhood papers or whatnot. To go out with him, to do some openings, or meeting some people—I did a lot of that.

So these were the three areas, basically that I photographed him in. So I see one of my pictures here with the Pope, John Paul. (*Refers to image in photo collage on wall*) I did that photo. I don't have it here, unfortunately. One Sunday afternoon Kay Spear called up and said, 'We need you immediately!' I said tell me where and all that, and not a week went by. Where is Saint Elizabeth Hospital? You know, some place here on the West Side? It doesn't matter. It used to be heavily Polish—it doesn't matter. Anyway, Karl Wojtyla was not Pope yet. He was there and Daley was there and—boom, they wanted me immediately. I didn't have a car then, not for years. I lived Near North, I didn't need a car. And before I even opened my mouth Kay said, 'And I'll send a car for you. But be there in five minutes if you can.' And that was Wojtyla—Pope John Paul II. And that's the picture of him there. (*Refers to photo collage on wall*) So usually in his

office—and of course in the press conference room, I did a lot of work. I covered all of his press conferences, virtually. Those were the areas of my contact with him.

00:19:52

Going out on location he always traveled with three cars. The advance car with two of his body guards who went out ahead to see if the location was secure and what's happening. And then the Mayor went in his big Cadillac with two drivers and body guards, and then there was a tail car, a car that followed him again with two body guards. And usually I traveled in the tail car with the old man. And very often I was able to jump out even before he got out of the car and just tag along with him. He'd say, 'Ludwig, come!' Or something. And that was that.

And I think I mentioned to Peggy yesterday, a kind of strange relationship developed between the mayor when I was sent into his office to take pictures of people shaking hands all that. Very often they went in, and then he buzzed Kay Spear to send Ludwig in to take pictures. But very often I ushered these people in, and they settled down and I sat down in the rear with my camera in my lap—I was like a fly on the wall. And something kind of developed without either one of us mentioning it. He had his hands on the desk like this (Gestures) and then the interview or something went a little bit too long and he started to rub his thumb, kind of like that. It was kind of a nervous gesture which after a while I became aware of. And when I had seen it the first time I would said, 'Mr. Mayor can we ask the gentleman to join you behind your desk for a photo?' And he said, 'Yes, yes, yes!' And I was able to really cut short the thing somehow. He never told me that. And then when the picture was taken, 'Mr. Mayor, thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.' And I pointed toward the thing (door). And he never

corrected me. No, once when Charlie Ritz was there from the Ritz Hotels, he says, 'No, give me a minute yet!' So actually we never discussed it. I was a little lightning rod for him—get rid of this, so he didn't have to say it. I think maybe once I missed it and he looked at me like a flying second. I said, 'Mr. Mayor if you could please be kind enough,'—and that was that. We never discussed it and it went on for a couple of years. Except for Charlie Ritz I never was wrong. (Laugh)

Break for telephone call

Kondor: Are we back on?

Q: We are back on and I would love to ask you if there were any places where you particularly preferred shooting the Mayor?

Kondor: I really cannot see. I did a lot of—as Peggy said—a whole bunch of things at his desk. I always studied his moods and you know, I tried to do a lot of shots with him and his wife. And I think I succeeded with a few—with quite a few, really. I tried to study his personality through his face, his expressions. I have some pictures when he is in a happy mood, and there are some pictures when I call him the elegant emperor. He's just standing there with dignity and all that. And there was—he confused me till he died really, because a lot of people made fun of his 'dems' and 'doze'. Speaking a kind of Bridgeport syntax somehow.

And one day—there was this official program, The White House Fellows. Military academy graduates and graduates of top universities—they have a year to work around the government around the White House. They are a pretty intelligent bunch of people. And one day they came up with about fifty of them and they filled up the entire press

conference room to meet the Mayor Daley. They sat down, he came in, and Frank Sullivan introduced them and the Mayor stepped up to the thing (podium). And he said something like—he started to talk. He said, ‘You came to see a big city mayor, let me talk to you like a big city mayor.’ And for a half an hour he talked about the city problems, major American city problems. And his analysis of it. And there was not one single ‘dems’ and ‘doze.’ That was professor, PhD Daley speaking not like a Southside Irish. So to this day I don’t know how much of that thing was a put-on that I’m one of you folks, okay?

Because I saw that once with the White House Fellows, and I just went like- (*Makes surprised look*) He was like a Harvard professor for political science or something. Or another case that was kind of interesting, there was someone—who the heck? Some New York Magazine, the New Yorker Magazine’s Editor-in-Chief, I don’t know—came to Chicago. And they were in a waiting group—they waited quite a while to get in a look at this big nasty wolf, or something, the machine boss, the pharaoh or something, and they went in and I don’t know Frank Sullivan or Kay Spear briefed them who these folks were because usually he was prepared for the thing. And for about fifteen minutes he chatted with them again, again Professor Daley, the great urbanologist. And then coming out, these two very elitist, you know, New Yorkers just looked at him and said, ‘I cannot believe it—this is man?’ He said, ‘He’s intelligent!’ Like they thought they would meet a pig or something! I almost kicked them in the shins, oh you stupid, prejudiced idiots, you know? They just couldn’t believe it. Again, no ‘dems’ and ‘doze.’ And they just couldn’t believe it. They said, ‘My God, did they misunderstand him?’ It was something.

00:26:42

So he had this ability, and sometimes I really wondered how much of that ‘dems’ and ‘doze’ was a little bit of a put on—an act. That he is one of the folks of the city—I don’t know. But I know he could step out of it just like that if he thought he should.

Q: Were there some places in the city that you felt the Mayor really liked to be photographed in, particularly?

Kondor: No, no. I don’t think he had any preference, really. He was a man of the people. See the photos at the Folk Fair. He didn’t even mind putting on stupid hats which I think Richard Daley his son, never did. And I don’t think politicians should because they look goofy in them, basically. (Laugh) But he even did that. He did have a common touch.

What was interesting at one of the press conferences—I got to go with these reporters and all that and sometimes they were asking things about him. I said, ‘Guys, he talks to you why do you ask me? Plus he pays my salary, so I’m not going to tell you anything.’ You know, Walter Jacobson was after me for a while. I said, ‘Walter, get real. Grow up.’ One, I don’t think I really know anything that interests you. But one year, Walter he came down for one of the press conferences, and he was asking the Mayor very pointed questions and I don’t know what the topic was exactly. And Daley was a little higher on the podium and Walter was there, and besides he was a little fellow too. And after the press conference Daley, he didn’t look down on him, but he looked at that bank of cameras, TV cameras, and he talked to them. Not down to Walter. And he was really so upset, ‘I asked him a question and he never talks to me. He doesn’t understand the media.’ I said, ‘Walter, you don’t understand the media, that’s your problem. You ask him a question, and he’s not going to look down talking to you—he’s talking to ten thousand households in Chicago—or one hundred thousand households in Chicago. And

he's looking in their face.' I said, 'You don't understand the media. He does.' And he went, 'Maybe you're right, but it's still insulting.' I said, 'Walter, life is tough.'

But he understood them quite well in that respect. Although he was a—not a man of what we call the media age. And maybe in a way I'm glad that he wasn't. He understood enough of what to do with it. And he had very many press conferences, virtually once a week. And I'm not sure if he was not preferable to this totally media hype, totally otherwise empty political characters. Who are nothing but media hype and pretty pictures and whatnot. But no substance. So I rather prefer some of the 'dems, dats and doze,' than the media pretty boys. Who are really big zeroes if you really scratch them a little bit. He was—by the time I met him he was the Mayor for nineteen years or something—so I already met a man who was very comfortable in his skin doing what he was doing, and he needed very little, you know, help from anybody at that point.

I'm sure Frank Sullivan and others tried to guide him a little bit or whatever. He was really an accomplished politician with all its advantages and all its disadvantages. And he was a creature of an age. And he was child of his own age—from the fifties on. And maybe that's some of the people who are so highly critical of him, they don't take it in consideration.

I can give you an incredible lecture of the idiocy of the French Revolution, or Louis the Sixteenth. You know with two hundred and fifty years later of insight, of course I'm a genius. Just nobody live through that thing—it wasn't the guillotine that chopped off my head. So, sometimes they call historians, history is, I can't think of the man who said that historians are 'backward looking prophets.' And they try to explain something that happened that had nothing to do with—and very often they're clueless. I know very few

honest historians. They all have a nasty axe to grind one way or the other. Because also, that sells something. You know maybe a thousand extra copies or something.

So I told you, that when the Chinese Prime Minister was asked about the French Revolution—too early to talk about it yet. Coming from a culture of four thousand years, two hundred years is just a blink of an eye. Okay, so. Mike Royko made a livelihood out of beating up on Daley. *(Laugh)*

Q: Did you know Mike Royko?

Kondor: Yes, yes. I used to drink with him. He was an alcoholic. I mean, I said, 'No, no Mike, a liver cannot handle that.' He was a boozier—very heavy unfortunately. But I understood him. To write a Daley column with the pressure on was immense. And to keep the level of production on, to keep it up—so I think that's the reason quite a few newsmen were really heavy on the bottle. *(Laugh)* He was a big drinker, God rest his soul. For him, Daley was virtually a cottage industry. *(Laugh)* Whenever he was out of some topic, he'd say let's beat upon the old man a little. And people loved it. And he had some great lines, you know, about the suburbs. 'The land behind O'Hare.' *(Laugh)* That land behind O'Hare—where strange little people live and they drive everywhere. I never lived in the suburbs, so I kind of like that comment—'the land behind O'Hare.'

00:33:54

Q: I'd love to hear your memories of some of the neighborhoods that you did live in—maybe some thoughts about what they looked like, or how they've changed.

Kondor: My first neighborhood when I came in 1961 was Hyde Park, right around the University of Chicago. First I lived in the International House for two years, and then I started to

live in small little ratty apartments where I could afford. I love that actually, I did a disservice to myself that I so rarely left Hyde Park and the University community I might as well have lived on the other side of the moon. I had so little to do with Chicago or the United States. I think I really got Americanized when I joined the U.S. Army and I was locked up for months with people of high education and virtually zero education from many places.

And that's where I discovered America—not in Hyde Park. I became a total intellectual snob—and I regret to say it. It was an incredible university, and it is a great advantage of living on campus—that you don't commute and you go home someplace. There I learned more in coffee houses or in a beer hall, or something over breakfast because when you leave a lecture or something you regurgitate it a couple more times, and talk about it with people from other disciplines—the advantage of it is immeasurable, believe me. Not that you take a lecture and run home to Cicero or something or Burbank. Okay, so put it that way—for my intellectual development, it was great. For my social development it was total zero. Because I had a difficult time dealing with people who were not U of C graduates. So I became a big snob basically. Well, if they came from Harvard we talked to them still, but you know. *(Laugh)* It was not very nice, but being on—to live on campus is huge. Because you really live and breathe knowledge and intellectual experience, no question about it. So for that I liked Hyde Park.

Then when I came back, I lived on Near North, on the Gold Coast as a single man, what can I say? I thought I died and went to pig heaven. *(Laugh)* It was nice, and enjoyable. And I made a lot of friends there. I didn't need a car. To get to City Hall I just hopped on a bus for about a five minute ride, and I was there. And usually in the evening I walked

home to stretch my legs a little bit. So that was wonderful—that was good. And on hot days in summer there was a swimming pool in on the rooftop. I undressed in the elevator going home in the August days. Make a gin and tonic and go up there. It was pretty good. And I lived on Kennelly Square and that one had a pool too. I liked those pools! So that was nice. I was thirty-something (*Laugh*) single, very free.

And then eventually I met my wife, and then when I left Daley—when Daley died, and then I opened a studio. And then I had a studio and I lived at 430 North Clark, when it was still the winos slept on my doorstep. Now you would like to see that! With the Starbuck's Coffee on every corner, and the little chi-chi French boutiques, and the little chi-chi French restaurants and everything. I mean you cannot believe it—oh, my God. I used to struggle through the winos on my doorstep in the mornings. And the evenings. And also right next to me was a gay bar, okay? I had no problem with that, but one day my brother who lived in Lake Forest and was very proper and all that—and on the way up, one of the boys pinched him. And he came up there and I thought he was having a coronary. He said, 'That son of a'—all kind of a screaming—and he pinched me! I said, 'Ah, they must like you Paul. What a social success you are!' (*Laugh*) I thought he was going to murder me. I was so used to it—and they didn't pinch me anymore.

Then that became very expensive and from one day to the next we were paying six hundred dollars a month, and they wanted four thousand dollars a month or something. Not a slight increase—he wanted to get rid of me basically. And then we looked around and we bought a property in Wicker Park that was empty. It actually was in demolition court—and we fixed it up. Now I think somebody last year sold it for a million dollars.

A couple of days ago with my sister-in-law we drove by there and I looked around. That went hippified or gentrified—oh my God—that whole neighborhood. I'm not sure—I mean it's good. When we sold it to go to Hungary that was good. Whatever money we put up we got five times more out of it. That was the nice point. When there are too many Starbuck coffees and chi-chi French somethings around the corner, it's a little bit hair-raising for me. It was good for our pockets, but when a neighborhood becomes so homogenized, it loses something. That was a nice old Polish neighborhood. And there was a restaurant, Sophie's nearby. It was a nice greasy pork chop sandwich and people were friendly and all that. And now, my God! Sushi bars, and chi-chi French joints. Oh goodness sakes! My hair stands up on my head.

00:40:26

Q: Did you ever go with the Mayor and photograph him when he was at dinners?

Kondor: Yeah—when all the kings and queens and yes—oh my God! Yeah, that was a big thing, emperors and kings and queens God know, sure.

Q: So that was a big part of it.

Kondor: And that had a procedure, too. There were these enormous receptions always in the Conrad Hilton on South Michigan Avenue. The reason was very simple. But it was very simple, when you invite five thousand people and how many hotels have five thousand silverware and plates? The Hilton was the only one. So that was the only show in town. There was the Imperial Ballroom which took three thousand people, and there were two more ballrooms. No hotel nearby came close to having enough glasses and cutlery or something. And there was a very rehearsed thing from that— from wherever the

people were staying—and very often the Hilton had the Imperial Suites up there, and then they came down on the second floor was the Normandy Room, a room not such bigger than this. It had very elegant wood paneling, and that was the holding area for Daley and his wife and the emperor and his wife, and the body guards and whatever—the protocol people.

And usually I had them—I took a picture of them in that setting. And from there when everything was ready, maybe like in the Army I would hear some trumpet sounds and they would walk—and they would have some photographs when they would go up and sit on the dais and they would drink and eat and there were the speeches and all that. It was always just about the same. The same kind of a routine. And some of these foreign folks made speeches that were kind of boring—and some were kind of fun. There was actually one kind of funny speech that kind of floored Daley until he realized that he was not insulted. The little king of Jordan, the little fellow—now I am such a big guy always talking about the little fellow (soft laugh). So he was a little fellow, a little character and all that—he started his speech, ‘That I, the Mayor of Jordan would like to express my thanks to the King of Chicago.’ And Daley at first he was stunned, he thought he was insulted. And then he started laughing and applauding. And he was just the Mayor of Jordan and he was just greeting the King of Chicago.

And most of them probably said the same thing—how wonderful Chicago is and thank you and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But it was part of the protocol thing and you know, and very often as I told Peggy, there was sort of a routine for many of these foreign dignitaries, kings, queens and whatnot. Usually they came to Washington to meet the President, or some people in Washington. And then maybe, New York and then almost

always Chicago because Chicago was the heart of America. And occasionally they went back to San Francisco, but usually New York, Washington D.C. and Chicago.

And then as I was explaining to Peggy, they landed at O'Hare, but on the military side for security reasons. It was much easier to secure. O'Hare has a military side—I think it still does, probably--under the Air Force's control. And they always landed there because they could be totally sealed off. The Emperor of Japan didn't have to climb over ten thousand tourists from China, or from Germany or something. So it was kind of sensible, I guess. Riley—it was always Colonel Riley's anything—after so many years it was a routine thing, the Army, then the Navy, then the honor guards. You know, laying the wreath in the Civic Center in Daley Plaza and all that. So there, the machine worked like it should. And s Riley was a good ceremony master, maître d', and a very routine old fox.

Q: Did you ever do any photographs with the committee—in the committee chambers—in the City Council, I'm sorry.

Kondor: I did very often photograph the Council very often in session and some of the Councilmen if I was asked to, but not really otherwise. I went down there often enough, but no. As I said, I got assignments from Riley, Kay Spear and Frank Sullivan. And Frank Sullivan sent me out very often because he needed material for campaigns. You know, campaign literature. Or to supply the neighborhood press with some local flavor and all that. So he was—he called the shots on that when I should go with him, if there was anything interesting or when I should just forget about it. Because it was a very big thing to send out all these photos and material to the neighborhood press on a very routine basis—on an on-going basis.

And it goes back to the time of his first election, in 1955 or something when his press secretary Earl Bush who was his press secretary for almost twenty years—the downtown press was against Daley. And he said, ‘Forget them—forget the bums. We’ll supply pictures for the neighborhood press—that’s where the people are.’ And he said, ‘I like that.’ Because the downtown press was pretty stuck up, ‘Who’s this guy from Bridgeport? This Irish character or something.’ The neighborhood press remained a steady staple of public relations to him.

Q: You mentioned Bridgeport—and I can’t resist. Do you have any particular memories of photographing Mayor Daley in Bridgeport?

00:47:12

Kondor: Yes, I have some pictures when he goes in the snowfall, voting in the fire station almost across the street or kitty-corner of something. Bridgeport probably hasn’t changed that terribly much. It is a very clean, very nicely maintained—it was a very simple neighborhood then. No coffee houses on every corner—no Starbucks on every corner. And I have photos of a very nice, neat brick bungalow. I’ve never been inside—very few people ever were inside. And people who say they were inside his house they tend to—chances are very good that they lie. Because his private life was private. And he did all the things putting on funny hats, going and talking, but when he went home that’s family and that’s that.

I think Frank Sullivan once set foot in his house because he had to deliver some speech very urgently at night. That was, I think his only time. Probably, he gave it to him and he wished him, ‘Good night, Frank.’ And so I’d never been inside—nobody invited me. It

was a simple neighborhood. Well maintained. It was a good Chicago, ethnic neighborhood. Maybe a little cleaner, maybe slightly better garbage pick-up than others, but nothing deluxe and no Starbuck cafes.

Q: So maybe I think we're getting ready to wrap this up, but I have one last question. Was there a shot that got away? Was there an image of Mayor Daley that you wished you had captured that you did not—that you were not able to do, that got away that you wished you could do, or maybe one that just never happened?

Kondor: It probably never happened. I don't have this void in my life that I might have---
hmmmm—if I could have. No, not really. I'll tell you one thing, I wish at least once he would have called me Laszlo, not Ludwig. I would have enjoyed that.

Laughter

Q: That's a really good-

Kondor: Let's call it on that one.

Q: Let's call it on that one. Thank you so much.

End of Interview Part 2