# Interview with Kathleen Sullivan

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Interviewer: Mark DePue


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DePue: Today is Wednesday, December 14, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This morning I'm delighted to have Kathleen Sullivan on the phone. Good morning Kathleen.

Sullivan: Good morning. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

DePue: Well why don't you tell us why we're not doing this in person, which is the way I like to do things.

Sullivan: Well, it certainly would be an honor and a pleasure to get together on it, but I'm at the point in life where traveling around does not appeal to me any more, though I **loved it** when I was younger. We moved here to Naples, Florida nine years ago and the last couple years traveling has become more difficult. I appreciate very much your being able to do this on the telephone.

DePue: Well, and I think Naples, Florida is probably a much better place to be today than cold, windy and a little bit wet Springfield, Illinois today.

Sullivan: Yes. I cannot tell you how absolutely gorgeous it is down here. For probably 320 days a year it is just magnificent. We have beautiful weather and it just seems strange that more people don't move to South Florida.

DePue: Maybe we all are headed in that direction eventually. We are doing this interview because you have an important story to tell about your involvement with the Equal Rights Amendment fight, and a perspective that we don't oftentimes get, the perspective of being one of Phyllis Schlafly's lieutenants. Would that be a fair way of putting your relationship?

Sullivan: Yes. I would say that's very fair. In fact, I felt very honored to be an apprentice to somebody as outstanding as Phyllis Schlafly. She is one of the most talented people I've ever, ever had the privilege of meeting, and she was an **incredible motivator**. And not just teacher, but she gave us the just nudging and very logical reasons to take on things that we might never have attempted on our own.

DePue: Well, having said that as an introduction to this interview, today I doubt we talk at all about Mrs. Schlafly, because there's so much to talk about in your early life as well. As we always do, we like to start with when and where you were born.

Sullivan: I was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Port of Spain is the capital of the little island. It is only roughly about sixty miles by forty miles, basically a square with two little peninsulas on the northwest and southwest end of the island. I was the fourth generation of my family born in Trinidad. My ancestors were French, English, Irish, and had gone out to Trinidad for various reasons: some were merchants, some where in agriculture, worked in the cocoa plantations and cane field developments.

My dad and most of his family were in the shipping business. Trinidad was the very early discovery of oil in the new world and actually, prior to the oil, Sir Francis Drake discovered what is called the Pitch Lake. It's a natural asphalt lake where the asphalt just bubbles up from underneath the ground. My dad worked on the camp that did the shipping of that asphalt. So it was a very unusual but beautiful setting, very much like South Florida here; on the beach, palm trees, and we ran around on this natural black asphalt lake as a playground.

DePue: Did you mention your birthday for us?

Sullivan: I haven't yet, but my birthday is January 22, 1934.

DePue: 1934

Sullivan: Right.

DePue: How hard did the Depression years hit Trinidad?

Sullivan: I'm not really too familiar with the details. I remember my parents talking about the business then. My mother's family for instance, had a jewelry store in Port of Spain; they were French descent. And I remember them saying that

was very hard to get through, and that's natural. In depressions, people do not seek buying jewelry and china and so on as an absolutely necessity. So that was hit hard. I remember them talking about that.

But by the time I was conscious of things in the late '30s, early '40s, Trinidad was making quite a comeback as a shipping port. There were a lot of convoys that would assemble in what's referred to as the Gulf of Paria on the western end of the island, and these ships would assemble there to convoy across the Atlantic during the early days of World War II. My dad was very involved in that, so my early memory is very much on the war situation and the rather important role that Trinidad played because of the shipping situation. There were British but also American and Australian shipping operations there and by then, the oilfields on Trinidad were really very, very fast moving and developing. One was Texaco Company, and we lived on that camp for a while. So it was a very busy little island and **very** cosmopolitan.

DePue: Before we get too much farther, can you give me your father and your mother's names.

Sullivan: My dad's name was Gerald with a G, Gerald Taffee, (pronounced taff) T-a-f-f-double e, O'Connor. My mother's name was Dorothy Marie Barcant, a French name, B-a-r-c-a-n-t.

DePue: B-a-r-c-a-n-t?

Sullivan: Correct.

DePue: Was your father's last name an o-r or an e-r?

Sullivan: o-r.

DePue: Well that sounds pretty darn Irish to me.

Sullivan: Yes. His father and grandfather were Irish. They were from Ireland but actually his grandfather went out to Trinidad in the British Army. He was the doctor with the British Army and he decided to stay in Trinidad.

DePue: And that was several generations before you came along?

Sullivan: Yes. I was the fourth of that line and the fourth on my mother's side also.

DePue: Well this is during a time when Trinidad is still part of the British Empire.

Sullivan: Yes.

DePue: Would you have considered your parents, your father especially, as being part of the ruling class at the time?

Sullivan: No, because there was a definite distinction between the British administrative level, the Colonial British authorities. They went out there for a certain period of time, whether it be two years, four years, six years. Those of us who lived there year round—and from one generation to the next—actually considered ourselves Creoles. We were European descent, but we were definitely very committed and bound to the West Indian—Trinidad and Tobago, the second little island—and we first and foremost considered ourselves Trinidadian. We lived in a British colony but we considered ourselves Trinidadian, not English or British.

DePue: Can you tell us more then, about the demography of the island.

Sullivan: The island has three sets of mountains. One goes across the very top, which is the tallest; one in the middle and one in the southern end of the island. [Christopher] Columbus discovered the island, I believe on his third trip to the New World; as he came toward the island from the east there, and seeing these three mountaintops as he was approaching them, that gave it its name of Trinity, Trinidad. That's where the name originated; Columbus himself called it that. Then several years later, as Sir Alfred Drake and the British Navy came out more often and did more of the actual establishing of businesses there and brought people out, I don't recall the years or how it corresponded with the American migration but it probably was along the same timeframe.

DePue: How about the breakdown of the population when you were growing up?

Sullivan: The population was a third India Indian. These were from the sub-continent of India and came out as what was referred to as indentured slaves in the early days. That is, they came out to work in the sugarcane and different industries—cocoa and also in the shipping—and they came for a certain length of time. I remember them talking about the contracts being three years, five years, whatever, and then they had a choice of going back—the Indians did.

I do not know what reason actually was given or why the ones that came from Africa were very different contracts, they were outright… They came to Trinidad and they stayed there. They didn't have the option of going back. I would imagine that had to do with whoever the leaders were of the, you might say, representatives back in India and Africa; it was probably set by those people as to just how they wanted to arrange. Did they take them back, did they want to have them stay in Trinidad?

India, as far as we can observe in a century or two, they did an awful lot of inter-education. For one thing, they wanted to speak English also. And I feel very strongly that probably one of the greatest things the British Colonial Empire did was to teach English wherever they went, because in today's world, especially with the communications we have, it's amazing how many jobs are handled now from their own continent. They can work in business—

enter communications with anybody anywhere in the world; to a great degree, I think that's because they are fluent in English.

DePue: So you mentioned one third Indian, about one third or more of a black, African population?

Sullivan: Yeah, there were about a third that were African descent, and the other third was really very mixed. We had a large population of Orientals, Chinese mainly. I can't recall too many Japanese, but a lot of Chinese, Indonesian. It was just all mixed up. There was quite a bit of intermarriage between all the different people. The whole population, when I was there, was under one million people, so it was not an extraordinarily heavy populated little island. We went to school together. It was quite integrated.

DePue: How large was the white population?

Sullivan: Oh, about a third. The Indians were a third, the African descent were about a third, and the other third was just a mixture of everything.

DePue: You mentioned the mixture of everything. You're 100 percent Caucasian it sounds like. How large was that population?

Sullivan: Oh. The Caucasian population was only 3 to 5 percent.

DePue: How did the economics between the various demographic groups break out?

Sullivan: Well that was very interesting because each group had sort of their specialties. The Indians were into small business. They were merchants and they were in all different… They had pretty much their own individual villages, separate from the African. There were two or three main towns back then and the Indians were not that many in the main towns; they kept to themselves more. By the way, it was a Hindu religious affiliation for these Indians, as I remember. I just remember observing it. I don't know what was prevalent other than Hindu, at that time, but the ones we had in Trinidad with that were definitely Hindu.

The African descent had their own villages also, but they would be more in the main towns also. The Africans were more into the general workforce; my dad's shipping department for instance, hired mainly African descent. Now, it could be that physically that was hard labor, and they really could do it. I remember my dad—they loved him. He would take me down on the pier and I would walk up and down and go onboard the ship and so on, and I knew a lot of the stevedores. Dad was their boss but he was their friend. He was very personally attentive to them. If they had problems, I remember them coming and you know, Boss, I spent my whole check and so on and I have nothing to live on, and dad would help them out. That was a common occurrence.

So I did not grow up at all with a feeling of segregation. When I came to the States, it seemed so strange that there was the amount of antagonism that I observed, different to what I was brought up with. I remember when I went to visit in Trinidad one time, it was the height of the Black Power movement in this country. We had one radio station down there then in the '50s—Radio Distribution Trinidad—and they were giving a news item from America, talking about the Black Power movement. I remember laughing with my family and saying, Well, we don't have to worry about that down here; that's all we have. And it was true. There were very well-to-do Indians, as well as Africans. We had a big Syrian population too, I remember. We all lived next door to each other in Port of Spain and we went to school together and so on.

DePue: Would you consider your family middle class then, growing up?

Sullivan: Yes, yes. We were not at all wealthy. My older brother actually paid my passage for me to come up to New York. He paid part of it and my uncle paid the other, because he wanted me to come up and help. He traveled a lot. He wanted me to come and help. I was an au pair for his five children; we did a lot of that, helped out each others families and so on, and it was a marvelous opportunity for me to come to America. I think I mentioned to you, it didn't faze me at all that I was going to miss the final senior exam. The opportunity superseded that.

DePue: Well that's a little bit ahead of the story. I'd like to take you back to your time in Trinidad. Tell me a little bit more about the neighborhood that you grew up in, Port of Spain. Was it a mixed neighborhood?

Sullivan: Oh yeah, very much so. It would be equivalent to suburban. The houses were on, I'd say hundred-foot lots. Rush Street was the actual location that I lived in town; it was just to the west of a big park that they called Queens Park, a big public park there and people went walking around the park. It was a big social get-together and yes, there were all different races. One thing I remember for instance: the Syrians had many relatives. They not only had several children, but they would have relatives living with them; there were two houses with like fifteen living in each house. That's just their custom. They owned two stores—general goods you might say—and were fairly well off, but they lived one block away. I was with their children a lot. We went to the same school together and so on. There were also Indians, everything you could think of, including some Americans by the way. (chuckles) It was really quite amazing.

DePue: I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about the grade school and the middle school that you went to. Was it a private or a public school?

Sullivan: Basically, we thought of it as a private school. I started at San Fernando, which is the second largest city. The school down in San Fernando, as well as

in Port of Spain, was called St. Joseph's Convent; they used the English term, convent. It was a girl's school. And the boy's school was right across the street, so we did have some, let's say interaction, but as far as classroom and so on, they were separate.

DePue: Does that mean it was a Catholic school?

Sullivan: Yes it was. But then as I was nine or ten, I realized it was not completely, but about 80 percent subsidized by the government—tax money. So it was quite phenomenal. The taxpayer paid for it but the nuns running the school seemed to have quite autonomous control of the school. We certainly had religious classes, we had math, we had benediction, we wore uniforms. It was beautifully structured; the school was divided into what they call four houses. Each class, each grade had a group of say eight or ten that belonged to each of these four groups, and that was the intramural competitive situation, whether it was for learning or for sports and so on. So we had our own intramural operation within the school. I was a prefect at one of the four groups for three or four years. The last three years I was there, there were only two of us Caucasian girls in a class of forty-five.

DePue: Was English the only language or were there other languages that were spoken on the island?

Sullivan: Only English as far as I knew. There probably were some others, but that would be like newcomers that came in. In general, everybody spoke English. In the stores, in business, in my dad's work and so on, English was the language.

DePue: What I'd like to turn to next then is whatever memories you might have about what was going on in Trinidad during the war. Maybe I should start with this. What was your parents' view towards the British Empire? Did they see themselves as proud members of the British Empire?

Sullivan: Oh yes, very much so. Many of our young people who were in their late teens or twenties went to join up with our Royal Air Force, the British Air Force, or the Canadian Royal Air Force. I remember those two particular, because both were Air Force. The others did go into the Army. I'm not real clear of memories to do with British Navy situations; it's kind of curious there because of Trinidad being so involved with shipping, but the shipping was more in the merchant type of shipping and in the supply routes. My dad was involved with the arrangements and the assembly of these convoys which were carrying ammunition and merchandise back and forth.

DePue: Well, it sounds to me like those convoys would be a nice fat target for German subs, and I know the subs were working in the western Atlantic.

Sullivan: You're right. So they must have had the support troops around these convoys looking for the subs. I just am not clear. I don't recall the people from

Trinidad going over to join the Navy, but we certainly were immersed in the shipping end of the whole war effort. A lot of my relatives and a lot of people I knew did go over to England and joined in the Air Force and in the Army.

DePue: Would the citizens of Trinidad at the time have been subject to the draft as well?

Sullivan: I don't think they were. I do not recall any draft being discussed. It's only after I came up here that I realized there was such a thing as a draft.

DePue: Did your father think about joining the military at all?

Sullivan: Well no, because for one thing he was quite a bit older. He was born in 1902, and in the First World War, he was at school in Ireland; he had to stay there I think, a year longer than you normally would because he couldn't get a passage back to Trinidad. So he was in his late teens then, in the First World War, but by the time of the Second World War he would have been in his forties or fifties; it was the younger ones that were going, not the ones of forty and fifty.

DePue: It also sounds like he would have been very important because of his role in the shipping industry at the time. Was that right?

Sullivan: Yes. Particularly in the merchant shipping situation. At one time he worked with the Alcoa Company. Trinidad was a terminal for bauxite. Bauxite is the raw material of aluminum, which was just really beginning to get used in many, many things. He worked at that terminal for several years, and I think that was probably at the height of the war years.

DePue: How significant was Trinidad's oil industry at the time?

Sullivan: My memory is, it was quite large, but I really have no idea, because I didn't have any concept of comparing it with what else. I know Texaco did build a big refinery in Trinidad; they would bring the raw material over from Venezuela to refine it in Trinidad and trans-ship it. That's when they discovered the use of the residue of the oil industry, the bitumen—I think I explained that to you—that's when the asphalt lake[1] became not as important as it was before, because this residue from the oil refineries was easier to use and move around for roads and so on, than the asphalt. Ever since, bitumen has been one of the main products of the oil industry. A lot of people don't even realize how big a product that is, but all the roads and everything in this country now is that residue.

DePue: Yeah, they drive on it every day.

[1] In Trinidad there is an enormous lake of naturally-occurring asphalt, a derivative of crude oil. The costs of the extraction, movement and use of the asphalt make the bitumen from oil refining economically attractive.

Sullivan: Yeah. (chuckles)

DePue: I wanted to talk a little bit about the political views of your family as well, if we could.

Sullivan: Yes. My recollection—that's where I mentioned to you—Dad took me around to a lot of the meetings with the unions, with the political activists and so on. The Indians and the Africans were the two main political parties, and the other third sort of worked with both groups. The competition was more between the Indian candidates and the African candidates. As things went on and after I left the island, the Indians got, I would say a clear heavy majority in the administration and the government. I don't know exactly how or what caused that, but it probably was their involvement with the business end more and the leadership. I kind of lost track of just who the different ones were, but they had some characters that were hauled off for different unsavory things. It's been sort of a very challenging, tumultuous thing, I think ever since.

Trinidad now, I understand, has a lot of problems with the drug trafficking—not that they grow it in Trinidad so much—but they trans-ship it from different Latin America countries—the local people there. It's a big problem I've been told. I still have some relatives there but I'm not in constant contact with them, let's say.

DePue: How close is Trinidad to the northern coast of Venezuela?

Sullivan: There are two points—one from Trinidad and a peninsula from Venezuela, and it comes within like about three miles of each other.

DePue: This is very close. It's very easy to get the boats across those straits then.

Sullivan: Yes, but that part of Venezuela is almost uninhabited, or it was at that time, and I'm not sure why that is. There wasn't much going on for fifty miles of that northeast part when I was young. What it is today I'm not sure.

DePue: Okay. I want to take you back to those years right before you came to the United States and you're still a fairly young girl. This would have been after World War II when independence movements throughout a lot of places in Great Britain were building. Was there some talk about independence during that time?

Sullivan: Oh yes, yes. Trinidad and Tobago became an independent country, I think in the late 40's, three or four years after the war.

DePue: I don't want to make too much of this. I read, 1962 on one website.

Sullivan: Was it that late?

DePue: Well again, that's what I read. Do you know if either the Indian or the African population would have been more inclined, pushing harder for independence?

Sullivan: Well, I really don't remember.

DePue: What would be your family's views towards the subject be at the time?

Sullivan: See, I left there in '50 and then left permanently in '52, but my recollection is that it was sort of inevitable. And all the islands. Jamaica became this independent country and different ones down the West Indian. Now, we still were connected with England for defense purposes. I think even today still, they have that agreement, and certain trade purposes. So there is still—it's not completely independent. There's still some contacts.

I don't recall which of the two main groups was more influential or more forward than the other. In general, the Indians were more assertive and the African groups—this is my recollection now, things could be completely reversed or upside down—the Africans were more laid back and kind of went along. As an example, African descendants were great in celebrating things. The famous carnival, which is a highlight in Trinidad. They party and the steel bands and so on, goes on for two months before carnival date.

DePue: Is that Easter, the Mardi Gras?

Sullivan: The Mardi Gras, yeah, which is the weekend before Ash Wednesday.

DePue: Right.

Sullivan: Monday and Tuesday is a general party across the whole island; everybody celebrates. But it's more so among the African descent and the third that are all mixed up. My recollection is the Indians didn't particularly get into that Mardi Gras spirit.

DePue: Well, I would think in part—I don't want to speculate too much—but Mardi Gras was very much tied to Easter, which is very much a Christian holiday. Hindus probably would not have been interested.

Sullivan: Correct, correct. I think it was the religious connection probably had a lot to do with it. But the rest of the island, you heard steel band music just around everywhere for a month or two before Mardi Gras. The competition would be such, down in the camps, so we had tons of it. In other words, they are very party-oriented. We were all in it. I organized the big float for teenagers when I was fifteen and it was sort of the thing to do.

DePue: Well it sounds like you had some fun with it.

Sullivan: We did. We had lots of fun.

DePue: Was your family religious?

Sullivan: Oh yes, yes. We were very faithful Catholics. Actually the schools did a wonderful job, not just as far as the religious faith being taught, but in the actual education level. We had many what they call Cambridge Scholarships awarded to each of our schools. There was one Presbyterian school I knew of, there were two or three Episcopal Anglican schools, the Catholic school, and there were some that were just government schools, that I remember. And bear in mind the three main towns; the rest of the island at that time were really just villages. So the schools in those villages were very localized. For instance, I don't recall them busing kids from village to village or into the towns. I'm not really sure. I wouldn't be surprised if a family didn't move into the towns as the kids got older and they wanted to have the kids in school. But the schools that were run were exceptionally good. It was interesting to me, when I moved to America, that my level of material covered and so on, was really the equivalent of not just a full high school degree but even from college content.

DePue: How else would you feel that schools in Trinidad were different from American schools?

Sullivan: Their discipline was very strong. Now I don't know what it is today but back then, the discipline was very good.

DePue: I'm talking now about your high school years, and this would have been in Port of Spain. Did you get involved with any extracurricular activities?

Sullivan: Oh yeah. I played basketball. I did artwork. I was painting and drawing—the club. My best friend in that area—I painted with her a lot—was a Hindu gal. We were very good friends. I was into a lot of sports with my dad and my family. They played in this big public park. We didn't have the intramural school sports that they have up here, because there weren't that many schools, period, but I did go to a lot of things with the adults. There was much more interaction between teenagers and adults than you find here. It would be very usual to have multi-age groups at functions. Whether it was a wedding or any family function and so on, the kids were definitely included to a much greater degree. We didn't have separate teenage type of activities the way we have here.

DePue: Did you enjoy the academics of the school?

Sullivan: Yes I did but I didn't appreciate how good it was.

DePue: What subjects were you drawn to?

Sullivan: Yes, definitely didn't appreciate how good. Someone who had made an incredible impression on me was one teacher we had for one year. She was the daughter of the governor of the island.

DePue: Do you remember her name?

Sullivan: Oh my, I have it written someplace but I don't recall it offhand. I can visualize her though, and she spoke with a beautiful English accent and so on. She taught us about English literature. She taught two classes on the sonnets and I thought, What are they? I've never forgotten, because she would keep saying, Some day, years down the line, you're going to remember what we're talking about here today. Now I don't remember exactly what it was, but I sure remember her. She gave you—she gave me anyway—a desire to look into history and what people said before, and were they applicable, and what could you learn from it and what could you try and copy from it. So we had some very outstanding role models, I guess is the bottom line. The situation here is there's just so many more people and everything, but I sure wish today that we had more stress on terrific role models for the kids.

DePue: Did you work while you were in the high school years?

Sullivan: Yes. I was a very good seamstress. I made clothes. At ten and twelve, I was making clothes for myself and my family, and I actually developed a sewing business and was compensated for it. I made wedding dresses. I was trying to remember what we charged for that at the time, but I don't exactly. I think some of the ball gowns—because there's lots of socialites down there—that would run about thirty-five, forty dollars, which in those days was pretty good income. I loved it. I enjoyed it thoroughly. We didn't have the facility, the stores, to provide fancy things and so on, so the homemade or handmade things were appreciated. I took advantage of that because I really loved doing it.

I made clothes for my six kids just for the fun of it. They grew up with mom's prom dresses as part of their growing up.

DePue: You mentioned this one teacher that had a powerful influence on you. Who else in your early years had maybe the strongest influence on you?

Sullivan: There were two or three nuns. One was a local Trinidadian nun and two others were Irish. Their dedication—and you might say prodding—to grow up, to be mature, was very… One actually taught me a lot of the sewing too, so I had great respect for her. She also taught home economics, which I loved, and I've thanked her for fifty-eight years for that, because I still do all our cooking. (chuckles) Things like that are very valuable in many ways. Besides saving money, you can show a tremendous amount of attention to your spouse and children and grandchildren by doing something special for them. That's not done very often up here now, I've observed. It's much more, Let's throw a pizza in the oven or let's go down to the closest drive-in. But fixing a special meal and knowing the basics of cooking has been a real, real joy for me personally and for our family.

DePue: I wonder if you can share a story or two, of your years growing up in Trinidad. Any come to mind?

Sullivan: Oh my. In general, it was very good memories. My mom and dad did not get along very well. My mom was a worrywart and she didn't share dad's general interests in the sports and different things. I was the oldest of three girls. I had an older brother but I was the eldest girl, so I filled in there. That was probably one of the greatest assets, because by sharing with my dad's interest in leadership, I think gave me extraordinary confidence of dealing with adults. That really helped me once I moved up here and got very active in civic things and so on. I was familiar with working with grownups, of being in on organizing and making plans and so on. In a way, it was a very beneficial opportunity for me, out of what you might say was a negative situation. I feel sorry that my mom did not share more of it, but had it not happened that way, I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity that I did. So it's a positive thing that came out of what was not a very good situation.

Today they call it a dysfunctional partnership, but there never, never was any thought of separation or so on; they just battled with words. I didn't like it at all. In fact when I got married I made a vow to myself, when I was walking up the aisle, that I would never, never, never argue or fight with my husband, and after fifty-eight years we never have.

DePue: I'm not sure very many couples can say that. I want to ask you just a couple questions. While you're in high school and specifically, what you saw as your future, what you aspired to.

Sullivan: Getting married. I absolutely wanted to marry a wonderful man, taller than I was, and a good Catholic, that we were on the same wavelength thinking-wise. Fortunately, my husband felt the same way. He is quite a bit older than I am—thirteen years—but as soon as we met, we sort of knew. In fact, I think he knew faster than I did even. That was just the most wonderful thing in the world, having a partner and sharing life with somebody that just fit what I was looking for.

DePue: Okay, well that's probably a good place then, to talk about the decision to come to the United States, even though—as you mentioned very briefly before—you didn't really finish high school. So walk us through that process of deciding to come to the States, and how you decided not to finish high school.

Sullivan: Well in Trinidad, if you had the opportunity to come to the United States, that was a premiere opportunity. You really looked at it as something unique and everything else could be postponed, put aside, whatever.

DePue: Why such strong feelings about coming to the United States?

Sullivan: Because America was recognized—and I still recognize it—as the most wonderful country in the world. That doesn't mean it's perfect, but we dreamed of the opportunities. And remember, my dad worked with many American companies, so I did have exposure to American business. Some of my relatives were up here in Canada. My older brother had gone to school in Canada. At the time he helped send me up, he was working in Venezuela at one of the oilfields, and he had funds that he could do it when my mom and dad did not. They had three younger ones still at home. And when this opportunity for me to come up and help out, I had no idea if I was going to just be here three months—I came on a visitor's visa—but while I was here, I began to realize how valuable a visa was, and what I needed to do to change it from a visitor's visa to an immigration visa.

When the summer was over and my uncle came back from—he was out in Bahrain, in the Middle East—it was getting cold up north. I didn't like the cold at all, so I went down to Brownsville, Texas, to live with a family who were the American Consul in Trinidad a few years before. They had three daughters about my age, and they invited me to come down there and spend the fall semester there, which I did, and I was able to sign up in a junior college down there: Texas Southmost College. They didn't care whether I had a high school diploma or not, I was such a sort of new type of individual that they didn't meet many of. Oh, came from a British colony and seemed to have the lessons that they considered equivalent to high school, so they took me in. I went to one semester of college down there; enjoyed it thoroughly.

DePue: What was the college again?

Sullivan: Texas Southmost College.

DePue: Southmost?

Sullivan: Southmost.

DePue: Okay, interesting.

Sullivan: It is the most southern college in Brownsville, Texas. I lived with this family and he was the Consul in Matamoros on the border. So he got me an immigration visa, instead of my visitor's visa. Then when it warmed up up north, I went back up north to my uncle and aunt, and spent the second summer there.

DePue: Well, I want to take you back and put you on the spot here. You said you just were very much interested in going to the United States, because it was such—I don't know if you used the word wonderful—but I wondered if you could be more specific. What was it about the United States that was such a lure for you? Was it that it was such a wealthy place or was it the political freedoms, what was it?

Sullivan: Opportunities, yes. If you tried something and it didn't work out, you tried something else. I realized by seventeen that Trinidad was very limiting. By then I pretty much knew everybody that was down there, not just socially but even business-wise. I was not going to go into… Well, I didn't think about civic activity or political life there, because women didn't do that down there at all, and being a Caucasian woman, you simply wouldn't have got voted to be anything. So realizing that, Trinidad was limiting, so America was the land of opportunity. I mean, we knew that. We read a lot of American magazines, literature, by then shortwave radio had come in and it was just that emigration tug and I wanted to go up and see what it was all about.

DePue: When we had our pre-interview you mentioned the difference in the way you graduate from high school in Trinidad versus the United States.

Sullivan: You didn't have a graduation—let's say—event. You took the Senior Cambridge Exam in July and you heard in about November, because their school year was January to December, by the way. You took the exam in the summer and of course it's summer down there all the time. You heard in about November, December, if you passed on that and if you got a grade one, two or three. Well, I left in April, so I didn't even take the exams, and then I spent two summers up here.

Now, bear in mind, and I'm very happy to say this. All the time that I'm here for the summer up in New York, I'm looking around to see if I'm meeting a possible spouse. There's no question about that.

DePue: And you would have been seventeen, eighteen at the time?

Sullivan: Yes. Seventeen the first year, eighteen the second. That was my goal, but it was going to have to be somebody that really fit my dreams. I wasn't just going to get married to get married. The thought of getting married just to be able to stay in the States was not there; that's something that's very different.

DePue: Well I definitely want to ask you more about meeting Jerry and how that relationship started but again, it's a little bit earlier than I wanted to, because I'm interested. You came—it sounds like to—was it New York?

Sullivan: Yes.

DePue: I want to hear your first impressions of the United States, having these very definite views of why you wanted to come here in the first place.

Sullivan: Well, my very first impression was looking out the airplane window and seeing that thread of magnificent light called New York. I thought wow, never dreamed of anything like that. Back then we didn't have jets. It was a nine-hour flight from Trinidad, a long time, but it was just a dreamland. You know, it's like a kid going to Disney World today I guess. It was very, very extraordinary.

My aunt and uncle were very good to me; they took me around. When my uncle was away on his travel, my aunt took me around, introduced me to a lot of different women's clubs and church groups. I was into the adult associations right away, and that partly was because they knew me and they knew I was accustomed to that. Looking back, probably that was maybe the most unusual thing in my case, that I may have been young in years, but I was probably five years more mature than my actual age. I was an avid reader. I really started going into taking advantage of all kinds of things.

I even went on some of the game shows in New York. That was absolutely hilarious, you know these—oh, I forget the first one I went on now. It was interesting that those people thought my accent, which was more pronounced then than it is now, was unique. They liked having somebody on that had an unusual accent and spoke about coming from a little rock of an island down off of Venezuela. Most people never heard of it. And the fact that I was educated was probably a surprise to them, because back then, they didn't even know what the West Indies were—except for the few that go on, tourists and so on—the rank and file. And remember, TV was just starting up. The TV was six inches in my aunt and uncle's neighborhood, and not too many people had them. So to go on a game show in those days was unique. I never won a huge, big prize but it sure was fun.

DePue: Did you have a sense of the size of the United States when you came here?

Sullivan: Yes, because geography was one of my favorite subjects, so I loved to just peruse maps. So yes I did, and I was familiar with the different states. When, for instance, I got invited to go down to Brownsville, Texas, I realized that was practically opposite, or the southern end of a triangle, about as far away from Scarsdale, New York as if I went to California. It was years later before I ever got out to California, but yes I did.

Also, my very first summer up there, I really started paying attention to the governmental structure. I remember going to meetings in Westchester County, which at that time were far more—let's say traditional, if not conservative—where today Westchester County is very, very liberal.

DePue: What was it that attracted you about American politics of all things?

Sullivan: I think it was the opportunity to interact and have a voice. I just really was drawn to that.

DePue: In a way that you wouldn't have had that opportunity in Trinidad?

Sullivan: No, no, because back then, particularly in foreign countries, women did not emerge in leadership positions. In Trinidad, I don't think they've ever had any Caucasian women elected down there, because the sheer numbers just don't work out that way. Women are involved and they are active, but not necessarily in elected positions. And it's not that I was aiming at being

elected, but rather aiming at having a voice, getting in on discussions and so on.

DePue: Okay. Well in the next session we'll probably talk a lot more about getting involved in a much more meaningful way in American politics, but a couple other subjects I would like to kind of finish up with today. The first one is to have you tell us about your experience as an au pair. Am I pronouncing that right?

Sullivan: Yes. That was a natural for me.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about your uncle to begin with here.

Sullivan: My uncle was very close to my dad. They went to boarding school in Ireland at the same time. He was a manufacturer's representative for one of the oilfield companies in America, from Texas. I forget the name of it now.

DePue: What was his first name?

Sullivan: Dermot O'Connor. He would come down and visit us in Trinidad a lot. I knew him. His wife was from Louisiana, a very delightful, wonderful lady. Taking care of children was a natural for me. When my youngest brother was born, I practically raised him. He was twelve years younger and he was like my toy, and he was crushed when I left Trinidad. I left him behind. So I knew how to take care of kids. I would go after school… Come to think of it, you asked about after school activities. At least once, sometimes twice a week, I would go and help another aunt and uncle from my mother's side of the family with taking care of her children. She had three altogether. I would take care of them as they arrived. It was a natural for me, to know how to handle babies, take care of little ones, as far back as I can remember, seven, eight, ten years old.

DePue: How old were your uncle and aunt's children?

Sullivan: They were like ten, eight. I think ten was the oldest, and they went down to a year and a half. There were five of them. So it fit in very well. I was seventeen then and they knew I knew how to take care of kids, besides the fact I could cook and I could sew. I was a mother's helper.

DePue: Were you expected to be teaching them some of their lessons as well?

Sullivan: I don't know if I would say expected, because they were in school, but I certainly helped them. We just did things that were learning experiences, and painting was one of them. The eldest daughter actually became quite an artist and has done fabulous things. She's now in her sixties. You know those sort of things we just did more of, because of the intergenerational activities, which you don't see as much of today.

DePue: Did you attend church services with them as well?

Sullivan: Oh sure, yeah.

DePue: Did you feel like more of an extension of the family than an employee of the family?

Sullivan: Oh, definitely. In fact, I don't remember that they even paid me. I was just part of the family, and they gave me the opportunity to come up here. I lived at the house; I had a room. They had a Cape Cod type house, I had a room to myself, and so my compensation was they're providing for me and giving me the chance to come up here. Then I got a job the second summer working at a department store in White Plains, and was making the grand salary of thirty-six dollars a week. Isn't that fabulous?

DePue: Were you a clerk there?

Sullivan: Yeah. In fact, the joke in the family was I would get pink slips because I'd spend more than I earned every week. So there was very much more interfamily and intergenerational communication and help and so on. It was not based on financial compensation nearly as much as it is today.

DePue: When you first came here, was it your intention to go back to Trinidad?

Sullivan: Yes, yes, but it was open ended. I had complete faith that the good lord was going to put somebody in my path that was meant for me and all I needed to do was keep looking around.

DePue: Well, this is a perfect opportunity then, to turn to that subject. How did you end up meeting your future husband?

Sullivan: Well that really is a storybook situation. He was visiting his sister who lived across the street from my aunt and uncle. Sunday morning I came out to have my uncle—I thought—take me to Mass, and instead Jerry's brother in-law was pulling out of their driveway. So my uncle said, Oh, can you take Kathleen to Mass? He said, Oh sure, have her get in. So I got in next to John, my husband's brother in-law. Then out comes Jerry. In his version of the story he says, "I walked out of the house and here's this gorgeous thing sitting in the car that I was supposed to get into. Oh, well, who are you?"

Now he knew my uncle and aunt, and so that's how we met, going to church. I went to Mass that morning, that was a Sunday. At that time, I had some relatives that were up in New York and their oldest son was in the hospital for surgery. So Monday, I went into the hospital.

Oh, I skipped Sunday afternoon. He had his sister call up my aunt and uncle and say,Would Kathleen O'Connor like to go out to Long Island with me? He was going to go meet a friend from University of Michigan where he went to graduate school. And they asked me and I said, Oh sure, that would be great. So we went out and had dinner with his friend and went to a place

where they had a little dance floor. Jerry wasn't the world's best dancer, but he was very impressive. And we went back home. That was Sunday night, the day we met.

On Monday, I went into New York City to see my cousin who was in the hospital. Unknown to me, Jerry kept meeting every train from 5:30 in the evening. I finally came out on the train at 11:00 and this voice said, "Kathleen." And I turned and here was Jerry and I said, "Oh." He said, "Well, I thought you weren't coming home tonight. I've been meeting every train since 5:30." We laughed and he said, "I'll drive you home," which was about a mile away, to my aunt's house. On the way he said, "Would you like to go out for a drink?" Now this might sound horrifying to you. I was seventeen, eighteen actually at that point. I said no, I'm really very tired. But the night before I had gone out to dinner with him and I had a drink and that was perfectly fine. My mom and dad would let me have a drink of champagne at certain occasions in Trinidad. It was no big deal.

On Monday, when he met me at 11:00, I said no, I'm really tired, to hear him tell the story now it's rather funny. He said, "Boy, was I deflated." Here I had spent all these hours and she said, No, I'm too tired. So he took me to my aunt's house. He said, "I suddenly mustered enough courage to say, 'Can I write to you?' because I was leaving." He was leaving to go back to St. Louis the next day. I was leaving to go back to Trinidad at the end of the week. He said, Can I write to you? I said, Oh sure, sure, and gave him my address and off I went, back to Trinidad.

We wrote each other about once a month and after about six months, my side of the story is, well, I dated just about everybody that was eligible down there and I needed to make a decision. If I was going to hold onto my immigration visa, I should go back to the States and renew it, and besides, I think I'll go back up and meet that Jerry Sullivan again and see what he is really like.

So I did come back up in—let's see—again the end of April, which was two years from the first time. I guess I was nineteen by then. He took one week's vacation after I was there about ten days, and came to New York. We got together four or five times at our relatives' house, and we had one big date out: went down to see "The King and I" on Broadway. His side of the story is, he says, After that date, I had so much invested, I had to ask her to marry me. And my side is, Oh, I knew I had you completely lassoed, and that was it.

Well, he didn't ask me before he left at the end of that week, but the next day he called up on the phone. He was with a friend in St. Louis and he said, You've got to excuse me, I have to go make a telephone call. He called me on the phone and asked me to marry him and I said yes. And I knew at that point that that was the way it was meant to be. So it's very, very wonderful, looking back on the situation we have had, but here's a key thing. Having both

grown up in the same faith-based atmosphere, we both feel is the foundation of our compatibility. We've never had differences of basic thinking and values and morals. Those nuns out in Trinidad did a fabulous job of imparting what was important in life.

DePue: Were your parents at all concerned that Jerry was thirteen years older than you?

Sullivan: No, because I think they too knew that was going to happen, particularly my dad. They were in England at the time we got engaged. They were going to be coming back through New York in August and going back to Trinidad, so we said, Why don't we get married on their stopover. That was a surprise to them. Do you really think you should get married that fast? Maybe you should come back to Trinidad. I said no, no, no, we'll come down and visit after we're married. It just seemed simpler, and so we got married at my aunt's house.

Actually, I had two aunts and uncles that lived in Scarsdale and I would sort of go back and forth between them. It's a real wonderful, wonderful life, a wonderful story, and a real melding of cultures and showing that in a nutshell, I would say the value of dreams, because if you do have strong beliefs and strong dreams, you can more work toward that than just sort of waiting for things to happen. That's what we've tried to instill in our kids and it's worked fairly well, but we've had some roundabouts. But they're doing very well and we have thirty-four grandkids now and ten great grandkids.

DePue: You said you had six children.

Sullivan: Yes.

DePue: I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more about Jerry. You mentioned that he had to go back to St. Louis. Does that mean he wasn't from the New York area when you first met?

Sullivan: That's right. He was just visiting there. He is an actuary and was working in St. Louis. He had just moved to St. Louis while I was back in Trinidad, so he'd only been in St. Louis a year—or less than a year I think—when we got married. Before that, he worked in Chicago and South Bend, Indiana when he first got out of graduate school. To go back before that, when he finished high school, he was in the Jesuit order for six years and got out of that—left the Jesuits in '44, quite a while before we met even.

Today, I think we're both very pleased. My side of the story again, is that he went into the Jesuits to keep you out of circulation until I grew up. He doesn't disagree with that, but also, the confusion in the church, and particularly Jesuits today, would have been very difficult for him and

obviously, the lord had other plans. And so our life was a storybook, a story that was meant to be, and we are very, very blessed.

Now, transferring that—which would be the next interview probably—into my civic activity here, was almost a natural. You meet somebody like Phyllis and you can see where we hit it off right away.

DePue: Well let's finish with this question then. Give us a little bit more—paint a picture of Jerry's personality and his character.

Sullivan: He's very much of a thinker. He's a mathematician type of thinking person, so that's his base. He's very sound and reasoning. He had a very sound educational background and had morals and values, so I respected him right off. There was no question that he was the mature person I was looking for, besides the fact that he was six-foot-four and very good looking. (laughs) You'll see that from some of the pictures I sent you. We just made a great partnership, because his work, an actuary, it's rather a boring job. He worked mainly in pension plans, not insurance which is where most actuaries work. But he'd say he came home from work to find out what went on in the world today, and he thoroughly enjoyed all the sports activities, his kids, his four boys, our four boys were in, but I did too. So we enjoyed our kids, we enjoyed their activities, that was the main thing of our life. We both enjoyed the civic involvement. He was very encouraging to me, to keep involved and to do things.

He jokes now about the fact that one of these days he's going to get me to go back and get my GED. And I said no Honey, it's the college of hard knocks. I did get to be a delegate to the electoral college for [Ronald] Reagan, in '84, so I have that certificate mounted. I tell the kids, "Besides your six degrees, here's my degree." So we have a lot of fun and joke about that. We're just very compatible, which believe me, I realize is most unusual today.

One observation that I think has hurt that partnership goal or ideal, is that somehow the competition between spouses seemed to develop to where it has become more paramount than getting along. It's your job and my job and you do this and I do that, so it's a competitive situation and even starts out that way. They don't get married as young, because they want to get their own personal this, that or the other first. I think that's very unfortunate, not only from the fact that I've lived the other, but also just observation. I mean a good partnership and marriage is doing for the other one, and if both do that, it just works out beautifully, rather than competition.

DePue: This is a good place to finish off that part of your life. We can certainly pick up these themes the next time we meet, but to close the loop on the whole story of you as an immigrant to the United States—and we don't need to take too much time on this—but I wonder if you could reflect on when you thought

of yourself more as an American than a Trinidadian—I think that's the term—and when you became a U.S. citizen.

Sullivan: I became a citizen within a few months of moving to St. Louis, after we were married. No, it might have been a year. I think we had our eldest son before I became a citizen. I thought of myself as an American from the time I decided to move back here and marry Jerry. Now, the question, what if the marriage didn't work out? Would I have stayed here? Probably, but the two sort of went together and there wasn't any reason that it shouldn't or wouldn't, so that didn't really seem like a major thing to think about. I just was extremely happy and eager to take advantage of all the opportunities, meet people, get involved, and make a difference. See, we were raised with the idea of, You did the best you can to make the world a better place than when you arrived.

DePue: I think that's a great way to finish for today. The next couple times we meet it's going to be talking about how you specifically sought to make a difference.

Sullivan: Okay. So you'll get some of the pictures.

DePue: Thank you very much. Okay. I'm looking forward to seeing these pictures now. Thank you very much Kathleen.

Sullivan: Okay, thanks Mark, bye-bye.

DePue: Bye.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)