

CHICAGO 1968 – Personal Reflections & Other Stories is a collection of short stories, both fact and fiction. Its lead story details the behind the scene action from the perspective of a Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey operative of what really happened in Chicago during the tumultuous 1968 Democratic National Convention that nominated Humphrey.

Chicago 1968:
Personal Reflections & Other Stories
by Neal P. Gillen

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Chicago 1968

Personal Reflections
&
Other Stories

Neal P. Gillen

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-297-4

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Published by Woodside Press

Printed on acid-free paper.

Woodside Press
2018

First Edition

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Finding Your Way as the Vice Presidential Nominee

In the days following the convention, I was back at work and trying to put the previous week behind me, when Frank “Nordy” Hoffman, the former Notre Dame All American, called me. Nordy was the staff director of the DSCC (Democratic Senate Campaign Committee), which had been chaired by Senator Muskie. “I need your help, Neal,” he said, and went on to explain that Muskie had asked him to organize his advance team. Nordy, a fellow resident of Potomac, knowing that I was experienced, requested that I drop everything and help him, which I did. Nordy was a hard guy to say no to, not only because of his imposing physical presence, but mainly because he was an over-all solid person.

After talking to Nordy, I enlisted a number of people I thought qualified, met with them and others that Nordy and the Muskie staff had recruited and briefed them on what was required. I helped to tailor the Humphrey campaign manual to Muskie’s specific requirements, which detailed the nuts and bolts of planning and organizing a successful campaign stop.

“How Do I Contact the Vice President?”

A week later I found myself alone with Senator Muskie in a large suite in the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri. It was Muskie’s first overnight trip of the campaign.

I had met Muskie and his staff earlier that afternoon when they arrived on their charter plane at Lambert Field. As their plane was taxing towards the Ozark Airlines hangar, where

Muskie would make brief remarks to a press contingent, I noticed a George Wallace campaign sign taped to the cockpit window of a plane serving as the backdrop. Wallace, an avowed racist in between terms as the Alabama governor, was running as a third party candidate. Thank God I noticed the sign in time and had it removed. Otherwise, the next day that picture of Wallace peering down at Muskie would have been the front page photo on every newspaper in America; and no doubt forever used as an example of poor advance work.

Following the airport press conference, the Muskie motorcade left for the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, where he met with local party officials and candidates before departing for a reception at the Chase Club. In the meantime, after checking into their rooms, his staff returned to the airport to take possession of Muskie's official campaign plane and finalize its interior configuration.

After the hour-long reception at the Chase Club, Muskie returned to his hotel suite for two hours to rest and to change prior to a reception at the home of St. Louis Mayor A.J. Cervantes. When Muskie asked me the whereabouts of his staff, I explained that they had gone back to the airport to set up his official campaign plane. At his request, I called the TWA hangar at the airport. None of Muskie's staff were available, but a supervisor informed me that the plane's reconfiguration was in process and it would take a few more hours to complete. When I informed Muskie of this he was not pleased.

Muskie was an insular man raised in rural Rumford, Maine. He was shy by nature and not much of a conversationalist. I had met him a few times in Washington and at the Maine Democratic Caucus in June. I did not know him well. Few people did, other than his family, staff, and a few senate colleagues. We had one common link, the Beliveau family from his home town of Rumford. Other than Muskie, the Beliveau's

were an influential family in the paper mill town of Rumford. The patriarch of the family, Albert Beliveau, was the first person of French descent to serve on the Supreme Judicial Court of Maine. Albert was married to Margaret McCarthy, the daughter of Matthew McCarthy, a municipal court judge in Rumford. Their daughter, Judy was a classmate of my wife, Mary-Margaret, at Trinity College in Washington, and their two sons, Albert (Darby) and Severin were friends at Georgetown Law School. Darby's wife, Alice Clark, was also a classmate of Mary-Margaret. Talking about the Beliveau family, particularly Severin, lightened things up and made Muskie more approachable.

Absent his staff, it was not a comfortable situation. I tried to leave him alone, suggesting that he catch up on his rest, but he asked me to stay, especially after I had informed him that his younger brother, Eugene, an iron worker from Los Angeles, had arrived at the hotel that morning. "I haven't seen or talked to my brother in a few years," he explained. "Who arranged that?" he asked. I explained that I was informed by a United Steelworkers' union representative in a phone call that morning and that I had passed the information on to his staff. "How come nobody told me," he inquired.

I didn't know what was going on in the head of this complex man at this important point in his life, but I surmised that he was beginning to realize he had lost control of his person, his privacy, and to some extent his decision making authority. He was now a national figure, no longer a senator from a New England state who a few weeks ago could come and go as he pleased often unnoticed in Washington and elsewhere outside of Maine.

Senator Muskie asked me about myself, how I came to be an advance man in his campaign and other campaigns. He was curious about the campaign's organization, who had planned his

trips, and how things worked in a national campaign. I explained that I had been involved in the delegate operation during Humphrey's primary campaign, informing him that based on meetings I had attended and from discussions with campaign staffers I learned that the travel for both Humphrey and whoever his running mate would be and their wives and perhaps their children had been mapped out prior to the convention. I noted that it was my understanding his staff had been fully briefed about the tentative plans. A wry smile came over his face and he asked, "Do I have any say so in this?" I told him that I thought he did, that probably he could add destinations he wanted to visit or question places he was tentatively scheduled to visit. Based on my experience in the 1964 Johnson-Humphrey campaign, I was able to tell him that changes in scheduling were a constant.

He thought for a few moments before informing me that he had not talked to Vice President Humphrey in almost a week. "Things are happening so fast," he mused. Then, he asked, what in today's age of email, cell phones, and texting would be a surprising question, "How do I contact the Vice President?"

I paused, thinking that they would have been talking on a daily basis, and said, "Call (202) 456 1414, the White House number. The switchboard operators will locate him quickly." I pointed to the private line that had been installed in his suite that morning. "You can do it from here," I said, and he did. Humphrey was travelling and could not take a call, but Muskie was transferred to Humphrey's office and left word with his staff to call him that night, which Humphrey did.

A few minutes later, the hotel phone rang. I picked it up. It was Muskie's brother, Eugene. I put my hand over the phone and mouthed to him it's your brother. "Send him up," Muskie said. A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. I

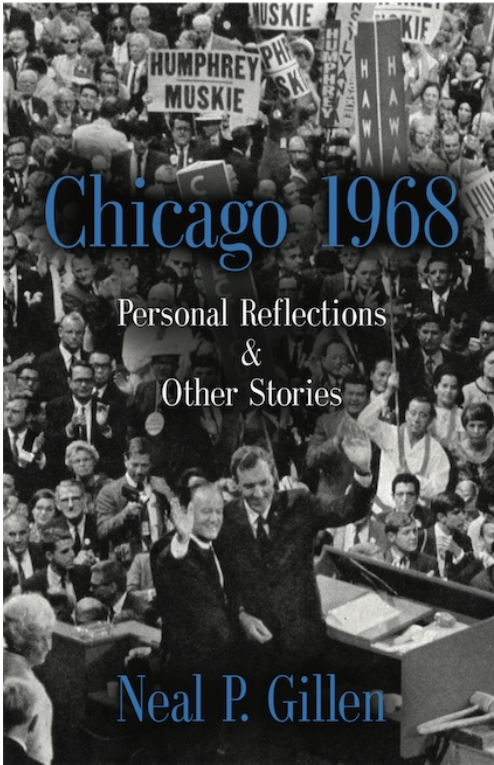
opened it and there, next to two Secret Service agents, stood a tall and well-toned man. “Hi, I’m Eugene Muskie.”

“Geni,” Muskie called out and walked over to greet his brother. I felt awkward witnessing this private moment. I watched as they stood back from each other asking about family. Senator Muskie said, “Geni, how about some lobster?” His brother nodded affirmatively, and Muskie turned to me and asked, “Can you do that?”

“I’m sure the hotel can do that,” I said. “How soon do you want to eat and do you want something to drink sent up?” Muskie smiled and the brothers gave their drink orders. Within an hour, Muskie and his brother were catching up on each other’s lives over steamed lobster. Strange how brothers go their separate ways, one becomes a Governor and U.S. Senator and the other an ironworker on construction projects in Southern California. It was World War II that separated them; Edmund went home to Maine to practice law and Eugene settled in California, where he had been stationed at the time of his discharge.

A week later, on the trip back to Washington from Norfolk, Virginia, on Muskie’s campaign plane, where I had advanced the Senator’s speech to a Young Democrats’ dinner, I witnessed a relaxed Muskie. He was all smiles and fully adjusting to campaign life as was his staff. Muskie proved to be an exceptional campaigner.¹⁹

¹⁹ Dirty campaign tricks by Nixon operatives in the 1972 campaign derailed Muskie’s candidacy during the Democratic primaries.



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