

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
FLAVY CHARLES "CHARLIE" FLOWERS

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Interviewer
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JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
WASHINGTON, DC

Brien Williams: This is a Kemp Oral History Project interview for the Jack Kemp Foundation with Flavy Charles "Charlie" Flowers, a former AFL [American Football League] football player [fullback]. We're in his home in Sandy Springs, Georgia, and today is Tuesday, August 16, 2011. And I'm Brien Williams. Charlie, we've been asking people to start these interviews with just what first comes to mind when you think of Jack Kemp.

Charlie Flowers: Well, when I think of Jack, I actually think of one of the best friends I've ever had. I think of his exuberance and his just joy of being who he was and where he was and what he was doing. He was a lot of fun to be with, and we had some serious moments too. We would go at it pretty hard sometimes in debate. I agreed with practically everything he said, but I didn't want him to know it. So we had some great times together.

Williams: Do any of those great times pop into your mind easily, and you could relate some?

Flowers: We met, as you know, the first year of the AFL we were the Los Angeles Chargers. We knew we were, but not too many people in Los Angeles knew we were. But anyway, so Jack and I met the first day of practice, and for some reason we hit it off as friends, and his roommate and my roommate at the time got cut pretty early and we roomed together. Some of the early conversations I had with Jack were pretty amazing, because Jack had, to my knowledge, really basically three great passions. One was football, one was politics, sort of politics, and the other was believe it or not, economy. So he would spend a lot of time after practice in the quiet of the night, we'd be

discussing things that I didn't think we were going to be talking about as a pro-football summer camp. So he was a delight even then. Those are the things that struck me about Jack being Jack. As I recall, might have been that year or a year or two later, that he worked for Ronald Reagan's group, and he really, really thought the world of Ronald Reagan and what he stood for. I think it had a pretty basic setup for Jack's thinking down through the years were those early years with him, with his group. Needless to say we had some pretty interesting conversations in that first training camp that year together.

Williams: Did you have to explain to the other players what Jack Kemp was all about because of this aberrant behavior, or not?

Flowers: Not really, because it's hard to remember it was 49 years ago, but from the very beginning it was obvious that Jack was going to be the quarterback. He was clearly the best, and had a cannon for an arm, as most of the ends and receivers could tell you, he had that. For some reason he became our leader. Not that he sought it, it just was his style to be a leader, and so you really didn't have to explain Jack's behavior or his interests, because everybody looked up to him and thought so much of him. Jack was that kind of guy even from the beginning. He was a well-thought of, aside from his talent, leader.

Williams: What form did that take, his style, or what accounted for people immediately—

Flowers: First, you have to be good. You can't be a leader if you don't have the talent. I mean, I don't know of one. So he had that, and he had that exuberance. Also Jack was bright. We all know that

obviously, but it was evident then that Jack knew what he was doing, and people just gravitated to him and looked up to him, and as I say, I don't think he sought that, it just was his by divine right, I suppose. You didn't have to explain Jack to anybody; he was pretty self-evident, I guess you would say.

Williams: Did you room with him the whole two years you were together?

Flowers: Yes. We roomed together training camp and on the road for the whole time we were there, and then the third training camp before we both got traded.

Williams: Talk a little bit about the Los Angeles Chargers, a team that is created out of nothing. What was it like?

Flowers: Right. Well, everybody was a rookie. That was strange, because we had old veterans—I think Jack had been playing for two years—and we had guys that had been in and out of the League, and so it was a mishmash of young guys like myself and older guys. We all had to just blend together, and I think probably [Sidney] Sid Gilman, one of his great talents, was making sure we all worked as a team, no individuals, and he was bigger than the team, let's put it that way. It was just like a group of guys came together and formed a team from all over the country—Wisconsin, veterans, guys from the Big 10 [collegiate athletic conference], the Pack 10 [collegiate athletic conference], some from the SEC [Southeastern Conference], they were all over the place.

Williams: You were part of the Team of the Decade at Ole Miss [University of Mississippi].

Flowers: Right, the SEC Team of the Decade? That's true, but for a fullback or a halfback or quarterback to be a part of the Team of the Decade, pretty good idea to have a real good team around you or you're not going to be the team of anything. So we had a great football team. As a matter of fact the Ole Miss team, 1959, was the SEC Team of the Decade, so it was possible because of that.

Williams: Right. And did several of you go into professional football?

Flowers: Oh yes, practically the whole starting team, either all the seniors and the junior the next year, all of them, practically, went in.

Williams: Tell me about your being courted by various teams, and signing two contracts, that whole complicated picture.

Flowers: When I made one of the All-American teams we went up to New York, and the [New York] Giants [professional football team] had drafted me the previous year because I was a fifth-year senior. So we visited, and they wanted to talk about contract, which was fine with me because we had a bowl game to play, but I was [unclear]. So they said if you sign a salary agreement it wouldn't be a contract but it would be an agreement that we would pay you this amount and you would earn this amount. I actually called back and the coaches said, "Sure, you can sign a salary agreement, just don't sign a contract." So I said fine. So I signed what I thought was a salary agreement. And I got back, the next thing I knew, somebody had said that my

contract had been turned in to [De Benneville] Bert Bell in the League office. I said no it hadn't either. But anyway, we went to court, and they admitted, finally, they called it a slight deception as I recall, and it was. So we won in court against the Giants. I never did really worry about it because I knew the facts. I was a third-year law student, so I had enough sense to know that if the facts were what I knew them to be, that was going to be the end of it.

Williams: And that court case occurred before you joined Los Angeles?

Flowers: Oh, yes. It was in May, before we went to camp in July.

Williams: Now review your thinking about why you were drawn to the AFL rather than the NFL [National Football League].

Flowers: There were several reasons. One is simply being from the South, I didn't really like New York that much. It was not something that I was familiar with. And like most people, you know, we're all enamored with California. Having never seen anything resembling California, I just had an idea of what it was. So it was that I liked that more, and the Giants by then, see I hadn't signed with San Diego, by then I was so mad at the Giants for what they were doing, and I realize that it was just the two leagues going at it, that I was just caught in the middle. That made it impossible for me to play for the Giants, so I just had a bad taste about the whole episode.

Williams: Did other NFL teams court you?

Flowers: No, they couldn't. I would have been drafted by the Giants after my junior year in football, actually my fourth year in college.

Williams: Now what kind of transactions did you have with Los Angeles Chargers before signing on? How did that work?

Flowers: As I recall, they came down at the end of December, we were in training camp, going to get ready for the Sugar Bowl. And they talked to me, as a matter of fact I think it was [Francis W.] Frank Leahy, who was the old coach of Notre Dame. This was a long time ago. But he came down and talked in general about what my contract would be. So then after the Sugar Bowl, I forgot who represented the Chargers, but they came down and the things that they said they would do, so I signed in New Orleans after the game that night. That's when the brouhaha started.

[interruption]

Williams: Did you have contact with Sid Gilman before the first day of practice?

Flowers: No. I did not know him.

Williams: When you were going through these negotiations, both with the Giants and then with the Chargers, did you have an agent?

Flowers: No.

Williams: This was before the age of agents?

Flowers: As far as I know I don't know of anyone who ever had an agent prior to our signing.

Williams: So all of you guys were doing this on your own.

Flowers: Pretty much, unless you had a friend who might have been a lawyer from your hometown or something that might could help. But no, there may have been some, but I really don't know. For one thing the salaries weren't enough to keep an agent in groceries. [laughs]

Williams: That's right, but now you had a leg up, because you were almost through with law school, so you represented yourself probably pretty well.

Flowers: I don't know. I don't recall taking anything in law school that got me prepared for dealing with these people, but I think probably to some degree it might have helped.

Williams: What was that first year like then, as a season?

Flowers: It was just football, and everybody was bigger and of course I came from a pretty tough league in the SEC, so it wasn't that big of a leap that I thought it was going to be. Like I say, everybody was bigger and maybe a little faster. The game was a little faster. It was a totally different form of football than we played at Ole Miss, because at Ole Miss we rolled out—the quarterbacks were all sprinters—and they had to get outside and they were part of the running game. And Jack, Jack tried to be, and he would get killed, and we would say,

“Jack, can’t you go out of bounds?” And he’d say, “I meant to, but I forgot.” And he would just come back all upside down. The pro football, the difference being it’s a passing league, obviously, and I did not come from a passing league, so in that respect you had to learn different forms of football like pass protection and that sort of thing that was not alien to me, but we didn’t emphasize it at Ole Miss.

Williams: Kemp was famous for scampering around in the back field and holding the ball for a long time. That must have put a lot of pressure on the offensive line.

Flowers: Yes, and he wore these junior high pad, he wore the least amount of pads he could wear. But when he had the football, and when he was scrambling, somehow I got the impression that he thought he was Ollie [G.] Matson or somebody, because he would go tearing down the field and just get wiped out, and not go out of bounds. Sid would get onto him and the players would get—and he’d say, “Oh, I meant to, but I couldn’t do it.”

Williams: Did he suffer concussions in those first couple years do you imagine, or not?

Flowers: Back in those days we had concussions and nobody knew about it. We had concussions and came back in the second half of the game. Might not have remembered a lot of it, but you played. So I don’t know, I don’t recall. Concussions, that’s a modern phenomenon, rightfully so. I’m not dismissing it, but we didn’t get any special time off for a concussion.

Williams: Describe Sid Gilman as a coach. What was he like?

Flowers: He was brilliant, he was a great offensive mind, he was tough. He would be your friend after you were no longer playing for him, and he would be your friend in the off-season, but during the football season you were just a cog in his machine, and that's all you were, as far as I could tell. Maybe with the exception of Jack, of the quarterbacks. They were different because they met all the time together and they ran the offense, so they had a different relationship. As far as we were concerned, you just did your job. He would be your friend later.

Williams: Was he really tough on you?

Flowers: Yes. He was not so much tough as he was demanding, and I don't know that he was ever truly satisfied with what he had. Very few people know this, but Lance [D.] Alworth ended up playing in Dallas, I think. Paul [E.] Lowe got traded. Keith [P.] Lincoln, who was a great football player, ended up somewhere. John Hadl ended up in either Green Bay [Packers] or Houston [Oilers]. All these guys, Sid always kept looking for somebody he thought was better, and sometimes they were and sometimes they weren't. It was not for me to say.

Williams: What was [William] Barron Hilton like as an owner?

Flowers: He was a fine gentleman. He stayed hands-off, more or less, as far as I knew, but he was a really nice person and was a real plus for the organization, I thought.

Williams: Did he interact with players much?

Flowers: A little bit, not a lot. I guess he was busy with whatever he was doing with the Hilton Corporation, but some, and always pleasant and always upbeat. It was a really great owner.

Williams: And he let Gilman do his hiring and firing.

Flowers: Yes. I can't imagine anybody letting Sid do anything but that, because he ran everything about the franchise that was run.

Williams: Is that typical of coaches generally, or is that unusual?

Flowers: I wouldn't think so, because Sid was the coach and general manager, and that is unique, certainly today there is no other team that has that that I know of. So he was the Chargers. What he said happened, and what he said no didn't happen. So it was just that simple.

Williams: [Charles H.] Chuck Knoll and [Allen] Al Davis were also around.

Flowers: Yes. It was obvious that they were bright, it was obvious that they were going to go somewhere. I think it was Al's first major coaching job, as I recall. And Chuck, I think he had just not been out of pro football very long. Yes, they were bright young brains and it was obvious.

Williams: You said a moment ago that when Kemp arrived, it was clear that he was going to be the quarterback. There were two other quarterbacks on the team, I think. [Robert D.] Bob Clatterbuck and [Robert E.] Bob Laraba.

Flowers: Laraba. I think they made a linebacker out of Bob Laraba, and the next year [George] Hunter Ennis came and played. But Jack, not to say these guys weren't good football players because they were, but Jack was clearly, I mean from the very first day it was obvious that Jack was going to be the quarterback.

Williams: Talk a little bit about race in the very early days of the AFL, and did Gilman have a particular point of view on that issue?

Flowers: Of course I was from Mississippi, so I took a lot of kidding, and I kidded back, and we were good friends. Paul [E.] Lowe and [Ernest] Ernie Ladd, and Earl Faison, [Ernest H.] Ernie Wright, we were all good friends. And we sort of blended as a team. Now when we went to Houston, as I recall, we might have stayed at the University of Houston campus, and I remember we went to a movie, and some of the black guys on the team either didn't go or couldn't get in, and we walked out, as a team. And that was the only thing I remember overtly of a racial nature. The guys on the team, we would kid each other, they would kid me about being from Mississippi, and I'd say, "Yes, I'm going to get you behind the cotton curtain," and we would joke about it. But we got along really well. There wasn't a place for that. We dressed together, we ate together, we slept together, we hit each other on the field, we were a team.

Williams: Was Ole Miss integrated when you were there?

Flowers: No.

Williams: So did you have a learning curve at all?

Flowers: Well no, because my hometown was probably two-thirds black, so it wasn't as though I was a stranger to blacks, I'd grown up with them. We were integrated. I would play touch football back when I was a kid. I don't think the SEC integrated, I remember that we liked to joke that when [Samuel L.] Sam Cunningham [Jr.] from Southern Cal [University of Southern California] came down and played [Paul W.] Bear Bryant of the Alabama Crimson Tide and just beat him to death, and I said that did more for integration in the South than anybody else, because Bear Bryant said "We can't win without African-Americans on our football team," so he immediately got good football players that way. So that kind of broke the ice. I don't know what year it was but it was the year after Sam Cunningham beat him so bad in Birmingham.

Williams: Did Jack have a particular role in terms of race during the years you were with him?

Flowers: Jack, to my knowledge, it's hard to say. He didn't even acknowledge that there was a race. In other words, to him, people were people. He just didn't. And I know that years later as he got into politics, he genuinely was on the side of whatever form of integration was necessary for him to taut [phonetic]. He was definitely a believer.

Williams: Now the '61 season was a real step up for you. You went 12 and two.

Flowers: Yes, we were 10 and four the first year, and got beat by Houston, and the second year we went 12 and two and got beat by Houston again, as a matter of fact. But yes, going to San Diego was just a wonderful, wonderful experience, because people cared. I remember one year, the first year, we played the New York Titans, and I think it was to cinch the AFL West Division, and in the [Los Angeles] Coliseum there were less than 10,000 people there. You could hear individual people yell. Ninety thousand empty seats. So when we went to San Diego, it was amazing the difference. They really cared, they came out for us. The exhibition games, even, they had a big crowd, so it was like night and day.

Williams: And that was Balboa Stadium, or Balboa Park, as I recall.

Flowers: Yes, and as I recall they had to do a lot of work prior to our coming down there.

Williams: Now the '62 season was pretty awful.

Flowers: Well, yes. I was going to say because they traded Jack and me, but I don't know.

Williams: That's my next question. How did you account for that?

Flowers: Well Jack, as I recall, I'd gotten traded a little bit earlier, but Jack, I think, broke a finger or something, and they had to go with John [W.] Hadl, who was a rookie, and by then the League had gotten kind of tough. It was the third year, and so as I recall they went six—

Williams: Four and 10.

Flowers: Right. By then I was either playing for New York or hurt. I lost contact with exactly how that happened, because when I left them they had enough talent to beat anybody, but obviously they missed Jack. That had to be one of the key reasons. I don't know if he was responsible for four and 10, but believe me, had he played, they would have been better. And it made Buffalo [Bills] immediately better when he got there.

Williams: Did others of you go in '62?

Flowers: I don't know. The attrition with the Chargers was so great, he would churn players. You never knew. He would bring them in, get rid of them. You'd say hello and meet somebody and their locker would be gone two or three days later. It was pretty wild.

Williams: Do you think Sid Gilman was really surprised when Buffalo was able to pick up Kemp on waivers?

Flowers: This came from Jack. Most people think Jack got traded, but as I recall he was put on waivers, then Buffalo picked him up, even with his injury. I can't imagine Sid Gilman being outsmarted on a waiver wire. That's not like Sid, that's not like that to happen to him.

I wasn't there and I don't know, but my guess would be he felt that maybe for public relations or something, that would be the way to get rid of him. I don't know why he did it, because Sid was too smart. All he had to do was pick him up in 24 hours, and he could have done that had he wanted to. So, no, I think he knew what he was doing. That's just me. I have no way to know that.

Williams: And you and Jack never discussed that?

Flowers: Well, not down to the nuts and bolts, but just that how surprised he was that he was put on the waiver wire with, as I recall, a broken finger. It sure got well quick with Buffalo.

Williams: When did you leave for the Titans?

Flowers: As a matter of fact it was strange. I left the Chargers, went out to a motel, the Titans came in and we played the Chargers the next week in the last exhibition game, and we went to Oakland and played Oakland [Raiders], and came back and played San Diego in the second game of the series. So I played three games out on the West Coast with another team. That was strange.

Williams: But you went over to the Titans at what point?

Flowers: It was the last exhibition game of the season, because they flew in and I joined them, and we played San Diego that week.

Williams: But you went to practice and played for the Chargers for the first—

Flowers: First three games.

Williams: Right, first three exhibition games.

Flowers: Yes, and got traded to—I think then he'd realized Paul Lowe and Keith Lincoln might be a little better than I was, so that might have had something to do with it. Keith was a great football player.

Williams: And then Jack, I guess, didn't leave until the season had started.

Flowers: Right.

Williams: I've heard this rumor or this story, that Jack after Buffalo picked him up, he came back to the practice field in San Diego to say good bye to the teammates and Sid Gilman would not recognize him, just looked the other way. Have you heard that?

Flowers: No, but it's certainly believable. Sid was tough. He was single-minded, let's put it that way, single-minded. People to him, football players to him were a commodity. Now he, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde once the season, he was a wonderful, wonderful guy after the season. But during the season, not so wonderful. I don't like to speak ill of anyone, but he was tough.

Williams: So talk a little bit more about the nature of your relationship with Jack Kemp, first maybe with football and then later.

Flowers: It lasted 49 years, so I'll make it as brief—our football association, we just sort of became great friends. And then when he played for Buffalo, I was living in Jackson, Mississippi, at the time, he came back through Jackson with Joanne [Kemp], his wife, and the kids. We had a babysitter, and we went to the Sugar Bowl together and had a great time. And then I was scouting at that time for the Chargers, and a couple of times I went to Buffalo to scout, and we'd get together there. As a matter of fact we went to the first Super Bowl together in Los Angeles. He had gotten beat by Kansas City, I guess, in the championship game, so they came out to the Coliseum, we joined them there, and Joanne and Jack and Sharon [Flowers] and me went to the game together, and that was '67. So then Jack retired from football, I think, '68 or nine, and immediately got into politics. It was always my belief that when you say "Jack got into politics," he got into politics because that's what it's called, but Jack to me was not a politician. Jack had a set of core beliefs, and to my knowledge it never changed. Jack did not, in the sense that politicians may sometimes put their finger in the air and see which way the wind is blowing, I don't recall Jack ever having done that, the whole time he was in politics. He began a group of his friends from all over the country, that we'd go to Super Bowls together, and Jack would put it all together, and get tickets from the League, and also I digress, but he was also the president of the AFL Players Association, so that was sort of a beginning of his political career. But Jack had three loves, as I said, football, economics in the sense that it was conservative economics, and politics to the degree that that's what it took to get his points across. So we would go to the Super Bowls together and just have a great time. One of Jack's big heroes was Abraham Lincoln, and me being from the South, I respected him, but he wasn't one of my

great heroes, and we would go at it, and I would read up on Abraham Lincoln so that I could pull his chain a little bit, and he would always defend him. We spent a lot of time teasing each other about Abraham Lincoln. We would get together at these Bowl games and just rehash and kind of renew our friendship. Jack was a skier, I'm kind of moving around here, but Jack was a skier, always had been a great skier. I'd never seen a pair of skis, but I love the mountains, we love the snow. So we went out to Vail early in 1980, and Jack had a friend across the street from where we were staying, and we just fell in love with it. And so he bought a place, and I bought a place in Vail in the early eighties. So then from that time on we saw each other in the winter and in the summer out there. We skied together, if you want to call it that. Skiing with Jack is the equivalent of seeing the back of his head, that's all you saw when you skied with him. Joanne would ski with us, Jack was gone. But he would wait for us at the bottom of the lift line so that we could ride up together. And so we skied together for years and years, and I got a little bit better, thank goodness. We really cemented our friendship, if that's the term, over those years. And then Judith [Kemp], his daughter, moved to Atlanta with her family, and he would come down and visit Judy and we would get together and renew. So it was an ongoing friendship for what? 49 years, that's a long time. But he was a dear, dear friend of mine.

Williams: Did he consult with you at all when he was the president of the Players Association?

Flowers: Yes, he didn't so much ask my opinion as he would run things by me, and I think it was his way of wanting my comment without him having to say "What do you think about this?" Because

he obviously had his own mind made up, and he wanted, I guess, it reinforced. So he would call me and say, "What do you think?" Well, I was not nearly, am not now, nearly as pro-union as you need to be to be president of it, so we disagreed quite a bit about that, good-naturedly, you know. He would call, not often, maybe three or four times.

Williams: In your judgment was that an important part of his life?

Flowers: Yes, I think so. He took it seriously, let's put it that way, and it was an important part of the League's life, so therefore whether you wished it to be or not to be it turned out to be important for everybody's sake, because they were combining the two leagues and that was a pretty difficult thing to do. He was right in the middle of that, but he didn't ask my advice about any of that. That was over my pay scale.

Williams: Any other vivid memories of your times with Jack Kemp as a friend?

Flowers: Oh, yes, gosh. The most vivid, obviously, were the years and years we spent in Vail together. Being Jack, everybody who was somebody in Vail, Colorado, loved him and befriended him. And because of that, I got to know so many people. He would have parties at his condo, or if he was invited to someone's party, like Dr. [J. Richard] Steadman or somebody, he would make sure we got to go. So we spent a lot of social time, and I would say this: of all the food I've ever eaten in my life, Mexican food was something I had never considered a meal. Jack loved it. Joanne loved it. And so we must

have eaten 100 Mexican dinners with Jack and Joanne in Vail. They loved it. Matter of fact, going to dinner with them was going to a Mexican dinner. They loved it. We had a lot of memories in Vail, social as well as skiing. We did just about everything together.

Williams: What was Jack like as a social being?

Flowers: He was effervescent, he was always up, he truly liked people and people could tell that, and people flocked to him. He really, he had to be the most popular guy in Vail, Colorado. I think he ended up making the Fourth of July speeches or something in the big stadium that they had there. He was a very social type person, and to my knowledge the leaders in Vail, if they had a party and he wasn't there, it very much surprised me.

Williams: Some public figures are on stage, and then when they're off stage they're quite different. Was that true of Jack or not?

Flowers: No. Jack was not multi-faceted. What you saw was what you got. People tell what kind of a politician was Jack, I really don't think of Jack in terms of being a politician. Politics was what he had to enter to do what he wanted to do. He had a core set of beliefs, and to my knowledge they never changed. They may have evolved one way or the other but they never changed, because we discussed them hours on end. Like I said, his really joy was conservative economics and this country. Those were the two things. And I think he realized that to do that, you had to get into politics. That was my understanding. Jack was not multi-faceted. What you saw was what Jack was.

Williams: I've heard the word impatient a lot in regard to Jack Kemp. Is that appropriate or not?

Flowers: I would say that maybe of the top 10 impatient people in the United States he would have to be numbered amongst them. He absolutely had no patience. He skied that way, he thought that way. His mind was so active. Yes, it was a standing joke. He couldn't stand in line. "Let's go, let's go." He suffered waiting poorly, let's put it that way. [laughs]

Williams: Did that ever become a distraction, or make it hard to feel intimate with the guy?

Flowers: Well it may have distracted Joanne, but I thought it was funny. We got a kick out of it. Everything Jack did on a human nature always broke me up, because he was so, not naïve, that's not the term to use, but he was so open in his social thoughts, in his friendships. You could tell what he was thinking. To me that was just a facet of him that I thought was amusing.

Williams: Would transparent be a good word to use?

Flowers: Yes, because he had no guile. I mean he did not hide in a shadow. As I said a couple of times earlier, what you saw was what you got. That was Jack. He was I think that way even in Congress. I think they had to get used to somebody speaking from the heart and the head, and he did, to my knowledge. I don't recall him varying from his core beliefs.

Williams: Did you do much riding around with him in an automobile?

Flowers: Only if I was driving. No.

Williams: Tell me about that.

Flowers: Jack drove, like we were talking, his impatience, he thought that he might have been the only car on the road, and I would say, "Jack, you're too valuable, and I love myself too much for you to kill both of us." And he would just break up laughing. "What do you mean?" Part of his persona was the way he drove. Just about everything that Jack did you could find some way to find amusing and mildly hilarious, because he was so open, no guile whatsoever.

Williams: But also dangerous, being a passenger.

Flowers: Well, the thing to do is not to be a passenger any more than you had to be. Luckily out west there was plenty of room, four-lane highways on I-70.

Williams: He retired from the Bills and ran for Congress in 1970. Were you at all involved in that campaign?

Flowers: No. I knew he was doing it, but not at all, no. I didn't get involved.

Williams: Did he consult with you at all about entering politics or not?

Flowers: We talked about it. I wouldn't say he consulted, because he was his own man; he was going to do what he wanted to do. I don't recall there being much doubt or much indecision about him doing it. I think he planned to do it. I don't recall him saying "I'm wishy washy, I don't know what I'm going to do." I don't recall that. The whole time I think he knew what he was going to do.

Williams: And you followed his career pretty closely?

Flowers: Oh, yes, absolutely. Critiqued it sometimes with him, just for meanness, because I knew him so well I could, I knew what would jerk his chain a little bit and I would do it.

Williams: You make reference to this in several places as being a kind of joking thing, but were there ever times when you really clashed ideologically?

Flowers: Not really, because I'm a conservative Republican too. Sometimes I would think Jack might have been a little naïve in what he expected certain groups of people to do, and I would say, "Jack, they're going to love you, they're going to shake your hand and they'll be friends with you and they're going to go to the polls and vote against you." And he said, "I don't care." And so that would be the only form of advice I would give. He already knew it. He was so successful that there was not much—I remember when he was head of HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development], I was visiting him, he was in his office, and a Senator from New York called. And they talked about this, that and the other, and then Jack said "I've got to write him a letter and tell him such and such." I said

"Jack, he was on the phone five minutes ago. Why didn't you just tell him?" He said, "Charlie, you don't do that like that way here." I said, "Okay, leave me out of it. I would have told him on the phone and saved the letter." He just laughed. He said "No, it doesn't work that way." I was not one to give him meaningful advice. He didn't need it.

Williams: Were there times when you were with him when he was down?

Flowers: You know, I was with him so much. He loved his children, they were his life. I'm trying to think of something that maybe that would have caused him to be down. Not really. Jack was just really, as I say, he was a pretty ebullient person. I don't recall him being highs and lows. He pretty much even across the board. I really don't recall any crisis that he confided in me that would really lower his spirits.

Williams: This will be a tangent in a way, but talk a little bit about your own career, because you got a law degree and then what did you do?

Flowers: I finished my law degree while I was playing with the Chargers, and whereas I really enjoyed the education, and I enjoyed studying law, I felt like there were two things you shouldn't do if you didn't really want to do it. One to be a doctor and the other to be a lawyer. You'd be better off not doing it. So whereas I really enjoyed the education, I decided after I graduated, I said "I'm not going to practice law. I just don't have the calling to do it." So a man offered me a job as assistant to the president of an insurance company, and

they also wanted to do some brokerage business with the agents, and I was to teach them the NASD [National Association of Securities Dealers] so they could be qualified, that sort of thing. I did that for a couple of years and I said I had enough of that. So I got in the brokerage business myself and I got with Smith Barney, and I was in the municipal bond business with them and then with Robinson Humphrey for 10 years, and then 10 more years with Morgan Keegan. So I had basically 30 years in the municipal bond business, and it was big farming, as my daddy used to say.

Williams: Was that in this area?

Flowers: Yes, I got here in 1965, and pretty much the whole time I've been in the bond business, or was in the bond business the whole time.

Williams: Did Jack Kemp ever try to encourage you to go into politics?

Flowers: We talked about it. It was hard for me to describe how little interest I had in politics. I just can't, I can't abide some of the things that take place in politics. It's just I can't do it personally. And I knew that I wasn't cut out to do that. And so we talked about it, and I think he agreed with me 100 percent that I shouldn't do it, and I was never interested, or tempted to be, in it.

Williams: Do you recall your last contacts with Jack?

Flowers: Sad. We were in Oxford, Mississippi, and I think it was around New Years, maybe of '08 or '09, beginning of '09, and Joanne called and talked to Sharon, and then Jack got on the phone and told me about the cancer, and he just floored me. Jack was so healthy. You just didn't, his longevity was never something you considered. And it just floored me. We would talk intermittently. As he got worse and worse we would talk to Joanne, talk to Jack, and it was one of the saddest four or five months I've ever had in my life. It was tough. I can imagine how tough it was on those poor kids, and Joanne, bless her heart. So yes, I recall a lot the last, from January to May, I sure do.

Williams: Did you go up and see him at all?

Flowers: As luck would have it, I was in the hospital myself with a kidney problem when I was supposed to go up to see him, so I couldn't go. They had a huge, huge, as you well know, turnout and everything, and I was in a hospital bed. It was tough not being able to go, because I wanted to say goodbye to him.

Williams: How do you think he should be remembered?

Flowers: I think that his strongest points, whether you agree or disagree, was his belief in what he was doing and what he believed in, and he never varied, he never waivered, and you could always know where he stood. And I think he was a, obviously Ronald Reagan, when you say that you're talking another stratosphere, but I think Jack was right up there in the conservative movement. When you think who we had prior to that, Jimmy Carter, and for Jack and these people to bring

the conservative movement forward, and to my way of thinking, just me, put this country in its best state that it had been in maybe ever. And I think Jack had a big part to do with that because he was in the forefront of the conservative fight, never backed down, but not vitriolic or mean-spirited, he was always up about it. Whereas he might jokingly tease someone on the other side of the aisle, I don't think he made enemies on the other side of the aisle. I think they respected him even if they disagreed with him. He could disagree without being disagreeable I guess is the term.

Williams: Do you think he would have made a good president?

Flowers: Yes, as a matter of fact I do. Of course I agree with his politics, and so you can imagine what I think about what's going on right now. Yes, I think he was smart enough to surround himself with some really, really bright, strong individuals, which I naively think helps make the presidency. I don't think one man can be that multi-faceted. But yes, I think he would do that, and I think he would listen to their advice, especially if he agreed with them. But I cannot see how he would have failed as a president, because he had a lot of the same attributes as Ronald Reagan. He had on the surface a simplicity that below the surface was not, he was a pretty, pretty complex individual, and he had a way of pouring oil on the waters. He had a style about him that people gravitate toward him. Even those people who he vehemently disagreed with and visa versa. So yes, I think he could have been a good president.

Williams: And you don't think with his energy level that he might have burned out with the responsibilities of the presidency?

Flowers: No. I think burnout was not a word in his vocabulary. Let's put it this way. Certainly in the 49 years that I knew him I never saw him remotely trending that way. He was a pretty up guy.

Williams: In '69, [Alvin R.] Pete Rozelle resigned as [NFL] commissioner. Did Jack ever express an interest in that position?

Flowers: Something triggers something in my memory, but I don't recall that it was serious. It may have been, but if it was, I was not privy to it for some reason. I really don't know what went on behind closed doors, so to speak. Certainly he would have been a good candidate for that.

Williams: Are we leaving anything unsaid that when I get out in the car there you're going to say "Why didn't I tell him that story?"

Flowers: Oh, stories, that's another thing.

Williams: Well let's have a little story section here.

Flowers: Let me think of a funny Jack Kemp story. One of the funny stories, when Jack would get at the top of the ski lift and started skiing, I said "Jack, please post your children on both sides of the ski run to warn the people that you're coming, because you're going to kill somebody, and I can see it in the *Denver Post*. "Kemp Kills Child." And he would die laughing, "I'm better than that." Vroom, down he would go, 100 miles an hour, never stop, just kept going, and I would think "Oh my goodness, is he going to make it this time?" But he was

such a great skier. And Joanne was on to him all the time about skiing so fast, but he wasn't out of control. To a Southerner it appeared that he was out of control, but he really wasn't. I was always on him about that. One of the funny things, I'd go over to his house in Vail and invariably, and I don't know how he got them, but there would be *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Denver Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, and he would have read what he wanted to read in all of them, and he'd really want to discuss it. When we'd sit down, that was the topic of the day. He wanted to discuss something, he would be irate about something he read in the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* and be happy about something he'd read in the *Wall Street Journal*. And so we would go down through that, to have that discussion. His interest in public service—I keep saying politics—Jack to my way of thinking was not a politician; he was in politics, but the pejorative term “politician” he was not. His zeal for public service would come out even on vacations when he would read all these papers and something would trigger him and he would go off, and he would either be really happy or mad as he could be. But that was Jack, that was Jack. Beloved. I really, like you say, the people that ran the gamut, are the people who loved Jack, or liked him a great deal, it would go from guys he knew in 1960 in pro football all the way to the last day. If you knew Jack and understood his foibles and his little quirks, you had to love him, because he was just wide open for everybody. Like I say, if you took the trouble and didn't prejudge, even if you were his enemy politically you had to like him.

Williams: Thank you very much for this interview.

Flowers: You bet.

[end of interview]