

10-31-04 Jack Faust / RFK

My thoughts regarding my participation in the RFK in EKY project.

Before I had spoken with John and Henriette about the Kennedy Project, I had given little thought to Kennedy's trip to Eastern Kentucky. The events of the months following February, 1968 obscured my vague recollection. Viet Nam; LBJ quitting the presidential race; the death of Martin Luther King; and the assassination of Robert Kennedy overshadowed the two-day trip to Kentucky. Over the years my recurring image of the life of RFK was the embodiment of the words spoken at Kennedy's funeral by his brother Ted:

"Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not."

I knew nothing about the Kennedy project when I began my work. I had no idea as to the scope of the project. I was unaware of the extensive effort that had been expended. As I worked with people associated with the project, I was amazed at the dedication and enthusiasm. As I spoke with people who remembered the visit, I came to understand the impact of the Kennedy presence. As I prepared for the performance, I came to realize that many of the problems for which Kennedy sought a solution still exist today.

Today there is no champion for the causes espoused by Robert Kennedy. Without that one person to lead, there is no one offering hope for those people Kennedy chose to help. Robert Kennedy had come to Eastern Kentucky in 1968 seeking solutions to problems from those people affected. He offered hope and opportunity. His focus was on the essential needs of the community ranging from nutrition to employment. Kennedy utilized a philosophical approach taken from a favorite author Albert Camus:

"Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children. And if you do not help us, who else in the world can help us do this?"

Each of us must be an instrument of change. Government may assist; but the role of government is that of facilitator and not provider. This was Robert Kennedy's personal message to the citizens of Eastern Kentucky. In the thirty-six years following Kennedy's visit, this message has been lost. The Kennedy project afforded Eastern Kentuckians an opportunity to think about how things are; to think about how things might have been; and to think how things should be. Voltaire said that each of us is guilty of all the good we did not do. And Peter Edelman personally reminded me that we need to get back to a movement for justice for everyone, everywhere. That is what RFK taught us.

So as I reflect on my experience with RFK in EKY, I realize that much work is still to be done. Robert Kennedy's meaning for all of Eastern Kentucky was hope. We must not let that hope die. Even after these thirty-six years, we are able to sustain ourselves with the words of the poet Aeschylus from which Robert Kennedy drew strength after the murder of his brother:

"In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

John F. (Jack) Faust, Jr.