

Actor Martin Sheen, who plays the President on TV's *The West Wing*, was interviewed for Reader's Digest by Presidential historian Michael Beschloss. Mr. Beschloss has been called "the nation's leading Presidential historian" by Newsweek. The author of six books on Presidents, he is a regular commentator on ABC News and PBS's *The NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer. In November 2002, Simon & Schuster will publish his next book, *The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany*.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do they ever actually film *The West Wing* in Washington, D.C.?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, we go for seasons. They like to get [camera shots of] snow, you know. And we go in the summer, late spring. We get the blossoms, the cherry blossoms. But mostly we go for the monuments. We always try to get the monuments in the background so the audience knows we're there. And we try to beat the tourists, so we film at night. But one night — I wasn't there, but they were in Georgetown filming at about three o'clock in the morning, and this irate lady came out in a bathrobe with a bunch of guys.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Complaining about noise?

**SHEEN:** Yes. "What the hell's going on? I have an early morning at the State Department. And, by the way, you people don't even have a Secretary of State on your show. And I think you should have one and it should be a woman." It was Madeleine Albright.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's very funny.

**SHEEN:** I met her later with her sister at Ethel Kennedy's house. We did a benefit there last year. She was wonderful.

**READER'S DIGEST:** She's a nice lady. And she's dealing with decompression from power quite well, which is pretty rare.

**SHEEN:** Well, she wasn't there but for a year and a half or so, wasn't she?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, four years. She was there the full second term.

**SHEEN:** She was Secretary of State after Christopher?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yes. Because Christopher left just after Clinton was re-elected. And she's writing a book now.

**SHEEN:** Is she? Is she a friend of yours?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yes. She was actually a trustee at Williams when I was a student. And her daughters were there a little bit after me. But Washington, as you know, is such a tiny town, and they only discuss one subject, as you know. Do you get out much when you go there?

**SHEEN:** Very little. We're there for a very short period, and the whole time is spent filming. We have to get in and get out. It's too expensive. It's very expensive to shoot there. We use the local crew, the New York crews. We use local people. The crowds [there can also pose a problem]. But we get a lot of cooperation from the D.C. police.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Has the Bush White House been as cooperative as the Clinton White House?

**SHEEN:** Yes, they have. But you know, I worked for Gore. I was volunteering for Gore.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I remember that.

**SHEEN:** And I've been a Democrat. And President Clinton was a big fan of the show and one of my heroes. I adored him, you know. So we had almost carte blanche. We got into the White House any time we wanted to do whatever. Any members of his staff were always making contact. They'd run the show for him. They'd tape it and he'd play it on Air Force One.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, he also understands show business more than any other President.

**SHEEN:** Well, Clinton had a lot of support here, a lot of support in the studios and television.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Wasn't Kerrey more popular in '92, then it sort of shifted to Clinton after he was inevitable?

**SHEEN:** No, I think Clinton made a lot of inroads here during that first campaign. He secured it in the second because we did not have a Democratic governor while he was President until Davis got in, and that was just the last two years. So he made a lot of forays in here, fund-raisers, and he got to know a lot of Hollywood people and studio people. He got a lot of support here. They loved him.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did you think he might have moved out here after the Presidency?

**SHEEN:** No. He didn't even check it out. I think folks thought he might, but to those of us who knew him, New York was the obvious choice — particularly when Hillary won. And what he did by moving into Harlem, my God, that was extraordinary. He's drawn that community together.

**READER'S DIGEST:** They're lucky to have each other.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How do you feel about Gore?

**SHEEN:** Well, I haven't talked to him [recently]. He's called a couple of times and he's wished me happy birthday and stuff like that. I talk to his staff occasionally. They keep me up-to-date with what he's doing. I liked him personally an awful lot. I chatted with him a little bit and I got to know him and his family. I love [Tipper Gore]. She's heroic.

**READER'S DIGEST:** She's delightful.

**SHEEN:** She's a lot tougher lady than many that I've met. She's very grounded.

[But Gore is] very insecure when he speaks in public. And he doesn't want to offend anyone or at least hurt himself. And that's all he succeeds in doing. When you get him now one on one, he's very sweet. And his big issue is the environment. He won me with that. He gave me material to read. Not just his book, but other stuff.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And the book was very good.

**SHEEN:** And he knew about what I was doing in the various groups that I'm involved with. Local stuff, you know. I was very impressed with him. We did *The Tonight Show* together and I traveled with him, and we went out on the road close to Election Day, and we did about 26 cities in two weeks.

The last weekend [before Election Day] I was in Washington, I was doing a thing at the White House for CBS. And I was sent — we were going title insurance Wisconsin the next day, and then we were supposed to go to Florida that day, Dade County. And at the last moment they pulled us out of Dade County, they sent Bobby De Niro down there. We thought, aw, that's great. He'll pack them in. Because Gore thought he had Dade County. And he sent us to Tennessee. So we wandered all over Memphis and Knoxville and — he didn't win Tennessee. We knew he wasn't going to win Tennessee when we were there. And the hope was, well, maybe we'll stir up some [interest].

**READER'S DIGEST:** Imagine if you would have gone to Dade County...

**SHEEN:** I've thought about it.

**READER'S DIGEST:** This poor man, for the rest of his life he'll think about things he should have done.

**SHEEN:** He still won the popular vote. And not by a slim margin, either.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And the worst thing is that most of the people who supported him last year are just completely fading. Not only fled, but they're angry at him.

**SHEEN:** Well, they're mad at the Old Man [Clinton], too. I guess it was Gore's decision. He wouldn't go out with him. Clinton was ready to go, would have gone anywhere. He should have taken him into Tennessee and Arkansas. Both states he lost.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, the other thing is that anyone who's going to blame Gore for Clinton, they were going to do it anyway. They weren't going to be additionally inflamed by the sight of Clinton.

**SHEEN:** You know, last summer, I [was asked to be on] the Green ticket. They came to me and asked if I would join Ralph Nader. I said no, I'm not even in politics. They said, well, they polled and said that I was polling as his running mate higher than anyone they had in mind. I said, no, please, let's end this right away. There's no chance I would do it. You know, I'm an actor. We already tried that once.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you have a candidate for the next Presidential election?

**SHEEN:** No. You know who President Clinton thinks it's going to be? Daschle. Good guy.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Would he prefer Daschle to Edwards?

**SHEEN:** Well, nobody high up is [saying]. We just had dinner with Clinton — this is when I was back there. He just came back from Africa. He came home and finally spoke. First time he spoke since he was President. We spent a wonderful four or five hours talking.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That was out here in California?

**SHEEN:** No, it was over in Washington. And, you know, it was the very night that girl [Chandra Levy] disappeared. And we noticed there was activity. Well, we thought it was Secret Service for him. We met in a restaurant there near Dupont Circle. And he was wonderful. He was funny and he touched on everything — very concerned about the AIDS crisis in Africa. And he met with Qaddafi. Remember? It was a big deal. Big secret meeting, no photographs.

**READER'S DIGEST:** [Qaddafi] has now gotten very pro-American the last couple of months.

**SHEEN:** Considering the terrorists, what else could he do? There's no telling over here with his economics. They're still on the list, but nevertheless people still travel there. In the Middle East, Tripoli's a big dropoff. So he doesn't want to kill himself economically. I'm real concerned about Iraq, though.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You think it would be a tough war?

**SHEEN:** You know what? No, it's not going to be. We'd beat the hell out of him. And they know exactly how to do it now.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So by concern, you mean you're concerned about the threat, you're concerned...

**SHEEN:** You know, the decisions you have to make in that office are real clear. It's numbers, how many people die.

The thing I admire most about Jimmy Carter is he surrendered his Presidency on that one. He would not go in because he said it would be between 2000 and 3000 people. He said, "Well, most of them would be innocent, then, wouldn't they?" And they said, "Yes, sir, but that's the collateral damage."

And he said no. They didn't do it. He said, "What could I live with more: a lot of innocent deaths or being ex-President?"

**READER'S DIGEST:** And that's what people in my line of work look for more than anything in a President, which is being willing to sacrifice yourself, if necessary, for something more important.

**SHEEN:** What happened in the desert when the lads were killed — remember the helicopter accident?

**READER'S DIGEST:** My wife is Iranian, [so I'm very aware of that situation].

**SHEEN:** It devastated Carter. Devastated him.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Sure.

**SHEEN:** You know, he's a military guy. Navy all his life. Commander. Nuclear sub commander. And he wouldn't sacrifice for personal gain. A true hero. I love him. I got to see him again during the Democratic convention. I gushed on him. I interviewed him when he was just out of office.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did you? What was the circumstance?

**SHEEN:** Joan Rivers used to have a nighttime talk show. And she took a couple of weeks off and they had guest hosts, and they asked me to do it. And they gave me a list of possible guests, and the President and Mrs. Carter had just published a book together and they were on tour.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, right. They almost got a divorce over it?

**SHEEN:** They were funny about it. And I said, "If you get me Jimmy Carter, I will do it for days." And they did. And one night — I did it for a couple nights — I had George C. Scott, who was playing a President in that thing, and Kris Kristofferson was the musical guest, and Jimmy Carter was the main guest with Mrs. Carter. I adored him. A truly humble man.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And more appreciated now than when he was President.

**SHEEN:** Oh, sure. But that's how he was when he was President. He took responsibility, took the rap. He didn't brag about the fact that he had opted to negotiate rather than be macho and risk all

those lives. He never mentioned it while he was President. It never left the situation room. His family knew, his staff knew, and he was already talking about re-election and thinking, this ain't going to help, Mr. President. But he took it, man. And that was big-time.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's for sure.

**SHEEN:** He was not a popular President. And that was an opportunity, just like 9/11. You know, you go to the military, you send lads overseas. But that incident in the desert...

**READER'S DIGEST:** I agree with you. It wouldn't have worked.

**SHEEN:** [Changing topics.] We're on the lot [where *The West Wing* is filmed].

**READER'S DIGEST:** Was this the original Warner Bros.?

**SHEEN:** This was it. We have two stages. And one of our stages where I'll be filming later is where they filmed *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Didn't I read that you loved Cagney when you were a kid?

**SHEEN:** Loved him.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you remember the movie when he goes in to see Roosevelt in the Oval Office?

**SHEEN:** Yeah. That's one of my favorite movies. One of the great performances. We watch it every Fourth of July.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did you ever meet [Cagney] before he died?

**SHEEN:** Yes. He wanted me to play his life story.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Really? I want to hear about that.

**SHEEN:** I spent a lot of time with him upstate on his farm. He came to visit me on the set of *Kennedy*.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I didn't know that.

**SHEEN:** Oh, it was big. He came down to New York City for some celebration. Somebody was giving him an honor, and he came to our set and — in a wheelchair, you know — and he was just, he posed for everybody and he was wonderful. Came with Floyd Paterson, remember, the heavyweight champion?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** And Floyd Paterson told me the story about John Kennedy, which was so sweet.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What was the story?

**SHEEN:** Well, Paterson just defended his title for the championship and he was invited to the White House. And John Kennedy asked him during the photo session, you know, with no microphones, "Who's your next opponent?" It was a big secret. And he whispered in his ear, "Sonny Liston. But you mustn't tell anyone." JFK said, "They won't find it out from me." So that was that.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's funny. Did he live long enough to know about Ali?

**SHEEN:** No, because Ali came in '64.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How do you like working with all these people at *West Wing*?

**SHEEN:** Oh, I adore them. They're like family, you know. We all get caught up and we're all licking our wounds from being shut out the other night [at The Golden Globes]. But we're happy as Larry for Charlie [Sheen, his son, who won an award for *Spin City*], because they all love Charlie.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's for sure. Are there ever sets that you're on where you don't particularly like other people in the cast? You don't need to tell me exactly which ones, but...

**SHEEN:** It's rare that there isn't somebody that's being a jerk, you know? I could use different words, but it's very rare. This is an extremely unusual situation. And I think mainly because we've all been through our downtime. You know, some of us, who will remain unnamed, are in A.A. We've all been through our phases of ego with career and we're all through with drugs and alcohol. There's



more teetotalers here than you can imagine. We've all been through it. And so we don't bring any of that in. We all pull for each other and really — I wish you could see us actually do a scene. Because the relationships are one thing on the screen, but they're backed up with the real deal in our lives.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I'm so glad to hear it.

**SHEEN:** It must be difficult for you to understand what's going on in this script. But what happened is that we're at the Iowa caucus. We go out on Air Force One. Most of it takes place on Air Force One. And Toby comes in, and he wants me — well, Richie is one of the Republican candidates. Three governors, two Senators. And the head of the church — an [Oral] Roberts-type character — is running as well in the primaries of the Republicans. And so they're trying to smoke me out. They're making a lot of brash statements to force me to my left. And there's a referendum on the ballot in Pennsylvania for a federal program, which has been dumped in most states now. It's civil rights. What do you call it? Affirmative action. There's a referendum on the ballot in Pennsylvania for affirmative action. And this fellow comes out in favor of it. But he did it very clumsily so that he could easily have turned around if it went against him. And so my staff is telling me, "Hit him and hit him hard now." And the reason I don't go after him is because he's not the primary candidate yet. But we think he's going to be the one. He's so clever and dodgy that he'll get out of this. They say, "Put him in it and bury him now." And I refuse to do it. I say, "Look, we're going to Iowa, because that's where we started. I want to thank them and then we'll get back on the plane. I don't want to be seen out there fighting for press with three governors and two Senators and the church of the "I Hate You." Let's just get in under the wire and get back to the White House, and we've already won." And there's a fight in the staff over it. They want me to be very clear about my stand on affirmative action, which is positive. And so I'm being cagey and political too, but I don't want to start any fights. And so in the last scene in the episode, Toby comes in and wants time with me. And I've already had a fight with him on Air Force One and dismissed him rather harshly. So he's nosing around, he won't leave. And so when he comes in and I say, "I thought you'd gone." And he says, "No, no. I'm watching results." I say, "It's going to be Richie." He says, "Yeah, I think you're right." And I say, "I know it's going to be him. Listen, I've got a nose for these things." He says, "All right." And I want to be polite but I can't get rid of him. And he's kind of looking at the carpeting, nosing around. He has something else [to say] and it's personal. So I invite him to have a drink and we start having a conversation about incumbency and the election. And he makes it real clear to me that I've got to make this fight, no matter who the candidate is, that the fight has to be between smart and not even close, between a heavyweight and a lightweight. Knock him out in the first round. Don't play with this guy. Because sure as hell you're going to try to be Mr. Nice Guy, just like you were with your father, and you're going to get whopped. I said, "What about my father?" He said, "Look, I don't want to get per-

sonal, but your father beat you, didn't he?" I said, "He hit me." He said, "No, he didn't hit you. He punched you, didn't he?" And I get very upset. I don't want to go into this. And so it's a standoff. But he can't stop. He is the conscience of the President. He always brings up the hard issues and the moral issues. So I'm bound to listen to him, although I'm always throwing him out. And so we have this terrible fight. And he says I want to be every President, I want to be like Mr. Johnson wanted to be President of all the people all the time. He says, "You can't be like that. You're going to upset your friends. But it's your father. You can't win another election and think you're going to get your father's love back. It isn't going to happen." And I say, "Why are we talking about it?" And he says, "People hit each other because they don't like each other. Your dad didn't like you. And he didn't like you because you were smarter than he was. And you don't want the American public to think you're smart. So you're torn between the Nobel laureate and the guy who's desperate for salvation." It gets real dicey. So I throw him out. I say, "You know, I should have thrown your ass out a long time ago." It ends on a very bad note. That's Episode 13. I hope I haven't ruined it for you.

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, not at all.

**SHEEN:** There are a lot of other issues going on that you'll have fun with. But that's the President's issue in this one. I only appear in three or four scenes. The next issue, which we finished last week, was Episode 14. And that is... would I spoil it for you if I told you?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, no.

**SHEEN:** Because you won't understand this one or what's going on?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No.

**SHEEN:** All right. In 14, a guy arrives at the White House that you will be familiar with. The actor is Adam Arkin. He came in last season for our Christmas show for Josh, who was having flashbacks of the assassination and feeling out of control. So we brought this guy in to talk to him and he helped him a lot. So we call him back in again and he's taking a tour of the White House and they keep asking him all these things. "Did anybody see you on the plane that you know? Does anybody know you're here, blah, blah, blah?" And they really vet him all the way up to the private study. And he gets in the study and Leo comes in and says, "Did anyone know you on the plane?" And he says no.

I'm seeing a psychiatrist, after I've just been censured, with the M.S. thing, and it's a re-election year, I'm going to lose. This will be the final brick they throw me and breaks the window. So this has got to be real confidential. I don't swear him to anything, but just professionally. He agrees. So we sit down and start talking. And all my scenes that episode, whenever they come to me, there are about four more little scenes, it's with him. And I'm playing cat and mouse with him and we're sharing jokes, and I'm looking at the TV and smoking. And finally he gets me — because I can't sleep. I haven't slept since that night with Toby. And he says, "What happened that night?" And I say, "I won the Iowa caucus." He says, "What else?" I say, "What else could there be?" And he says, "No, what happened?" So I start telling him about the fight I had with the aide, and it comes out that my dad never liked me. So now we set sail on this journey. And it gets very interesting with the President. And you really see a human being kind of unraveling — his emotional life, his spiritual life, his private life. He ends up throwing the guy out. He gets mad at him. But we know from what's been talked about that we're going to see him again. So it gets really interesting. And that's what this is about. A long time ago I suggested a script where the President had an ongoing chess game with everyone all the time, everywhere. Wherever he went — in the press room, there was a chessboard, and he made his move and went on, so that there were like ten different chess games going on. Because he's supposed to be so good. And so they're finally using it here. I got the chessboard — and the whole thing going with China and Taiwan is the chess game.

**READER'S DIGEST:** It's a perfect metaphor for what the job is.

**SHEEN:** It is a good one.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Because you've got 90 of them. Boy, a terrific idea.

**SHEEN:** But we always wanted to get this thing where whenever I came in to a meeting or just passing a door, I'd just pop in and make a move, whether anyone was there or not. And I'd keep walking. Because you knew he knew all the moves. And he'd know if anything was touched. Incidentally, I forgot to mention those LBJ tapes were passed among the crew and the cast.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, I'm so glad to know about that. Thank you for telling me.

**SHEEN:** And John had listened to them. So he knew you.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, that's terrific.

**SHEEN:** And, of course, Tommy is the guy that started the whole thing. He wanted us to hear how a real President sounds.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's just the way I really hoped that they'd be used.

**SHEEN:** You edited them yourself?

**READER'S DIGEST:** I did.

**SHEEN:** Are you privy to a lot of information that you should not be privy to?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yeah, I might be. You mean from the tapes or otherwise?

**SHEEN:** Yes.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yeah. Not so much from the tapes, but otherwise.

**SHEEN:** They really entrusted you. You listened to them there in Austin at the library?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, I got copies, and Lady Bird gave me these diary tapes, too, that are on there.

**SHEEN:** And you keep talking about her diary. She made a note. That's wonderful. You know what that does, historically. You set up accurately, Lady Bird made a note in her diary.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's what I felt. It softens him a little bit and also puts him a little bit more in context.

**SHEEN:** They were inseparable, weren't they? I mean, spiritually?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, they were — I mean, you know what the marriage was like.

**SHEEN:** No one could get to him any quicker than her. He'd drop everything for her.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's true, but there were a lot of layers. In fact, I just did a PBS special on her, which I'll send you.

**SHEEN:** Really? I met her once too. I adored her.

**READER'S DIGEST:** She's a wonderful woman.

**SHEEN:** What a classy dame.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, yeah. But there were many other women and life was always in limbo and it was very complex.

**SHEEN:** I loved the way she talked to him. And the way they talked about each other, I thought he was so considerate of her. I don't know what their relationship was. It wasn't important. I just know that they adored each other.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's absolutely right. But I guess what I'm saying is that in many ways he was really impossible. And the point is that she loved him and she admired what he was trying to do so much that in the end, although it drove her crazy hourly, that was what was important to her.

**SHEEN:** He was a Leo, too. I'm a Leo.

**READER'S DIGEST:** When is your birthday?

**SHEEN:** August 3. [My son] Ramon is Aug 7.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You have the same birthday as John Eisenhower.

**SHEEN:** As Eisenhower?

**READER'S DIGEST:** As Eisenhower's son.

**SHEEN:** Oh, really?

**READER'S DIGEST:** And I don't know why I remember that, but...

**SHEEN:** Aug 3.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And you're 40, aren't you?

**SHEEN:** I'm 61.

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, but 1940.

**SHEEN:** 1940, yes. People send me cards with the history of that year. Nothing happened. Absolutely nothing.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, if I'm scraping for Eisenhower's son...

**SHEEN:** Was he the colonel in Korea?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Exactly, who they were worried would be kidnapped and tortured.

**SHEEN:** You know, it's interesting. I've read Merle Miller's book, *Plain Speaking*. I was a big fan of Mr. Truman as well.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Turned Truman's reputation completely around.

**SHEEN:** Yes, it did. Because even the Democrats didn't like him. Because he didn't like JFK.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Absolutely.

**SHEEN:** But he really didn't like the father, Joe. He hated Joe.

**READER'S DIGEST:** He said, "Don't drink Scotch. Drink whiskey. Because every time you drink Scotch it puts a dollar in Joe Kennedy's pocket."

**SHEEN:** And he loves his whiskey. I knew a guy in the press pool who played cards with him on the train. He loved him. They loved Truman. He was a real man of the people. And yet he was so crafty. Politically, he was so crafty.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And it's another example, like what you were saying with Carter, where it took people years and years to realize what they had. I think in Truman's case about 20 years. I was going to ask, when you were growing up in Dayton, were you interested in politics? Were you aware

of Presidents?

**SHEEN:** Eisenhower was President, and he was a national hero, so that's the way we thought of him. My dad was a Democrat. He was a factory worker.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did your father come here from Spain?

**SHEEN:** Yes.

**READER'S DIGEST:** At what age?

**SHEEN:** He was born on the day that the United States invaded Cuba, July 2, 1898.

Now, the war actually ended, or the whole thing ended around 1901 or 1900. But there was a quota on Spanish immigrants. Not Hispanic or Mexican, but from Spain. They really punished them.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Spain to the U.S.?

**SHEEN:** Yes. To get in from Spain was a trial. He came when he was 16 with an older brother. They tried to get in the Port of New York and were refused, so they went to Cuba. My dad lived in Cuba for a few years, working in the sugarcane fields, got his teeth knocked out. And he came into the United States through Miami as a quasi-Cubano. He was finally naturalized around 1930 in Philadelphia.

It's recorded now at Ellis Island. We have documents. They'll give you documents. But now they have computers that will tell you what boat they arrived on. My mother was born in 1903 and she arrived in 1923. She was 20 years old. She was among the last. They closed it in '24. She was among the last that came in. And I followed her trail. I went down — you can go there now and they show you where people went that were refused and where people went who were sick. It's fascinating.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You know, it's Caroline Kennedy's husband who did that.

**SHEEN:** I didn't know that.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yeah, he did the museum there.

**SHEEN:** Really?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** That's brilliant. You know, I have a story there with the Irish tenors. We did a concert from there. We shot it right there. For PBS. I'm big on PBS.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I know that.

**SHEEN:** We did "The Irish Tenors at Ellis Island."

**READER'S DIGEST:** I forgot that that was there.

**SHEEN:** Yes, yes. And they were just over the moon. They were like kids in a candy store, going to the museum, checking relatives. You can go right there and they'll tell you the specific ship, how many were on board, where the person went from there... you had to have a sponsor or a group or something. My mother had a cousin in Dayton, Ohio. That's how she ended up there. She came to work as a domestic.

**READER'S DIGEST:** In Dayton?

**SHEEN:** Yes. And my dad was a factory worker for the National Cash Register Company for 47 years. He never changed companies. He was sent to Colombia, but he didn't work out there. Then he was sent to Bermuda, and that didn't work out. And the war broke out and Bermuda was a British possession. So they moved back to the United States. And I was the first one born here, and I'm a seventh son. There were nine boys and one girl. My mother had twelve pregnancies and ten survived. The two — one was stillborn, the other died a few weeks after birth, and he was a male. So I get credit for being the seventh surviving son, but my brother Al, who's a year and a half older than I, is actually the seventh male. So we share the seventh-son thing.

When I was growing up, all my brothers in front of me were caddies at a local golf course, private country club. It was called the Dayton Country Club. And the pillars of the community belonged there. They were mostly... they were all white. Most of them were doctors and lawyers and businessmen, you know, or people who lived off their inheritance. What do you call it, rich loafers?



And some of them were very nice people. But the majority of them were unconscious. They didn't know your name. They didn't want to know anything. You were a servant. You were called caddie. I started in 1949 as a caddie. I became a professional caddie. It's literally how I made my living. It's how I left home at age 18. I caddied in big-time professional tournaments. I caddied in the last match play PGA, which came to Dayton in 1957.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I did not know that.

**SHEEN:** Yes. They gathered up all the caddies, the best caddies. My brothers and I were the top caddies in the region. We were pretty good amateur golfers, as well.

In those days, few golfers could afford to have their own personal caddie so they picked up guys who were there, and the guys who were there knew the courses and could club them. It was cheaper for them and they didn't get these big prizes they get today. So all of us from the Dayton Country Club — the top echelon of caddies — went to the last match play PGA. And one of our kids from our club won it, a kid named Mike Early. At any rate, my days of golf go back to that era: Sam Snead, Tommy Bull, Frank Stranahan. I saw all those guys play when I was a boy.

One of my heroes played there, a crippled golfer who won the U.S. Open in '53. I saw him play at the PGA in the match play. He got beat. He had one arm. His arm was withered. My left arm was smashed at birth. And they just put me aside to work on my mother. They didn't think I was going to survive. They baptized me, even. And I survived.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Your mother was in danger, too, wasn't she?

**SHEEN:** Very much so. And so my arm never got tended to, and it grew withered. My left arm is half the size of my right, about three inches shorter. I've learned to carry it so that it doesn't look that way. My shoulder looks like a pyramid from the forceps. One time when I was in New York on my own, I decided to have it fixed. I went to a clubfoot clinic in New York Hospital, and they took X rays. They were very excited, never saw anything like me before. They were going to try to fix it. I'd go through a welfare program, because I was kind of a guinea pig...

**READER'S DIGEST:** How old were you at the time?

**SHEEN:** Eighteen. I went through all the procedures, and I got a week off work. They were going to cut the tendons out of here so I could turn it. I can't turn it any further than that, see? They were

going to fix the shoulder. They just said I would have a lot of scars. This is surgery. I agreed to do it because I'd have the use of it, and it wouldn't be so incapacitating. I went to the clubfoot clinic that first morning, and I was the first one there. I started — I swear, this just occurred to me — I was reading *Reader's Digest* there in the office and I was reading a story about Charles Laughton, who was involved with a theater, I believe, in Houston, Texas. The Alley Theater. He was coming there to do a production. They were all excited, and they did an interview of him in *Reader's Digest*. I want to mention that.

**READER'S DIGEST:** We'll put that in.

**SHEEN:** Yes. And every now and then I'd look up, and the clinic started to fill up with people. Now it's getting to be eight o'clock and it will be opening at nine. And people are coming in, and gradually the room filled and I got up and left. I said, I don't have a problem. They [the clinic] used to call me, write me letters. I never, ever acknowledged it, ever. Never went back. Never saw them again.

I'm just giving you a little of my background. We were Catholic, an immigrant family. We grew up in a white neighborhood, but it was all blue-collar. There was a mixture of extraordinary people that we all adored. They were mentors. Everybody in the neighborhood looked after everybody else. And everyone had kids. The woman across the street had lost a son at Pearl Harbor, and as a child, I remember seeing the star in her window, and we all knew what that meant. It was reverence to Mrs. Humphrey. She used to stand on the porch every night in the spring through all the summer and yell out, "David. David Russell." Russell was his middle name. And we'd be off paying hide and seek. We knew that was it. We had that phrase, "ollie-ollie-ox-in-free." You ever hear that? We'd all say, "That's it. Mrs. Humphrey is calling her boy home. We've got to go." So we'd go home. And that was the neighborhood I grew up in, all poor, working-class people. Not quite poverty, but poor. So all of us caddied. Everyone I knew caddied or washed cars or did odd jobs, mowed lawns, had paper routes. Whatever you could make a buck at. We supported ourselves. My dad retired in 1964. At the time, I was growing up he was making maybe \$110, \$112 tops. We had a little house, a three-bedroom house that we all doubled up in. I never had a bed alone until I was a senior in high school and my brother went to the Navy. I got the bed. I was glad to see him go. You know, everybody went in the military in my family, most of the lads were in the military. I had a brother in Korea. I had two in Vietnam.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Were your parents political at all?

**SHEEN:** They were not actively political. My mother died very young. She was only 48. I was almost

11 when she died, so I didn't really get a good sense of her. I remember her well, but I didn't know her politics. She was in the IRA. Her uncle was big-time IRA, right in the center of the Republic, right in the heart of the Troubles.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And did she talk about it?

**SHEEN:** Oh, yeah. I grew up with the Irish fight songs, up the rebels. I knew them all. Yes, she was great.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I'm trying to get a little bit of the sense of the sources of your activism.

**SHEEN:** It would be those two guys. My dad thought politicians were all crooks, but he had a great love for the country. He loved it. You couldn't say a word against America. He'd bitch about the economy and about conditions and about politicians, but he loved the country. You couldn't say a word against the country. You'd get a look from him, man, you'd never open your mouth. We grew up with that. The country was sacred, because he came from abject poverty and no hope, and most of the world did, too.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did he talk about his childhood and staying in Cuba?

**SHEEN:** Oh, yes. A lot. He was a remarkable man. I adored him. I thought he was 6'8". He was the biggest man in the world. He was my hero, my first image of God, as our fathers should be. I left home when I was 18 and came back when I was 21, and then I was surprised. He was only five seven, and I could look over the top of his head. And we'd be in public and I'd slouch down. How can you be taller than your father? I used to walk around like this with him, you know. He had this magnificent basso profundo voice and this very thick Galician accent. It was the *th* sound of his "*gracias por nada*." You know he had that sound. He'd roll the *r*. I'd love my name when he'd say Ramon. I named my son Ramon. They used to call me Ray in school, but that was sissy. I was not Ray. I was Ramon. He was the only one who ever called me that. I adored him. But we learned our politics from our association primarily with the upper crust. We were servants. So we observed them.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Was there class anger?

**SHEEN:** I wouldn't say it was anger, because they were not my heroes. There were one or two fellows there, young guys. There was a guy named Frank McBride, who was a local lawyer, who'd

gone to Notre Dame. Oh! He went to Notre Dame, you know? I mean, that was like the Citadel! We were all Catholics, and everyone else was for Ohio State or they went to — you know, Notre Dame, man! And we revered him. He was very kind to us all the time. And there were a few. Baumgardner was another guy who was very kind to us.

And we had relationships with [the country club members] but they were, at best, a servant/master relationship. There were black people who shined shoes, served drinks and cleaned the locker room. There were no black caddies — we were all poor, all white. And you never went in the clubhouse. If a guy forgot to pay you, you hung around until he went home, man. Half the time he was half drunk. You waited. You waited, man. You didn't go in there.

**READER'S DIGEST:** But politically, did it lead you to think why is it that there are people inside and people outside?

**SHEEN:** They were all Republicans. And they were all, obviously, well-to-do. They could afford this. It was a very expensive, very exclusive club.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Restrictive racially and religiously?

**SHEEN:** Oh, my. I don't know if it was religiously, because there were some Jewish members. And there were a lot of Jewish jokes that I remember that they used to tell each other. And the thing that used to upset me — they used language. I grew up with nine boys, and most of them went in the service after they got out of high school. They had some language, when they came home, but I never heard language like I heard there.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You mean vulgarity?

**SHEEN:** Vulgarity, obscenity. It made me embarrassed. I never use the F-word because of that. I find it offensive and vulgar, and it reminds me of that class. I just avoid it like the plague. I get upset a lot, but I don't use that word. If you hear me say the F-word, I'm mad. I consciously avoid it because of that.

Also, we'd have to play up to these guys and it made us feel like we lost a measure of our dignity. Because you want the tip. You want them to like you. And we always called them sir. Mr. So-and-So or sir. Never their name. And the worst thing of all was when you were kind of invited to cheat.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What do you mean "invited to cheat"?

**SHEEN:** Well, a ball would go in the woods. You'd go in there — oh, man, you'd rather die than lose a ball—because they played for a lot of money. So you knew what was at stake. And they'd talk about each other out of earshot. "What did that sonofabitch do? Did he miss that last putt?" I wasn't watching. I was in the woods. I'd say, "Yes, sir, he really did. He really had a four." "The bastard put down a three. I knew it." That's the way they talked about each other. And they're hail-fellow well met when they're with each other. "Hey, great shot. Oh, I'm going to get you now, kiddy." They told the most obscene jokes. Jokes that we'd be embarrassed to share — about women and blacks and Jews and so forth. And that was off the cuff. They didn't have any sense of propriety about it. It was the way you talked. It was like I learned about Nixon later. He used to talk to Haldemann like he was a sailor. [But in front of others] he talked like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And complain about Truman's use of bad language.

**SHEEN:** When the worst he ever said was maybe call someone an S.O.B.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's exactly right.

**SHEEN:** He never used the F-word. That wouldn't come out of his mouth. He'd never use that word, never. So that was where we were growing up. For nine years, I was schooled by these people, and I learned more what *not* to do, how *not* to be.

They were not my heroes. My dad was my hero growing up and he still is. My dad taught me honesty. If you're honest, you're free. You're the only one you have to live with. If you're honest, that's it, man. And he was scrupulously honest — so that we always felt intimidated.

Growing up, my politics were Democrat, liberal and squarely on the Democratic ticket. If the guy was a Democrat, he could be a criminal. If he was a Democrat, he was a man of the people. And so he was always the underdog, so, you know, I was pulling for Stevenson the second time around, and we were against the Rosenbergs' execution.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did you actually demonstrate or anything like that?

**SHEEN:** No. I was just a kid. The only demonstration... I led a caddie strike about 1953. I founded a union, which lasted exactly 48 hours. They crushed the union, and the only members left were my

brother and I. And he would have stuck to me to the end, but I finally let him off the hook. I said, "Brother, it ain't going to work this time." And he said okay and we went back to work. But I was striking for higher wages. I got the lads to walk out for six or eight hours. And we picked Ladies' Day, which is Tuesday morning. The ladies had never carried their bags. This is before there were carts, you see. The carts had just started to appear. And they were like, these aren't going to work.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So half the day you hit them where it hurts?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, that's when we hit them.

I had a political mind. My dad worked at the NCR. They were not allowed to have a union. Theirs was a company union. They treated their employees pretty squarely, but they didn't want a union.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Was he frustrated and angry about having no union?

**SHEEN:** It affected him in a lot of ways. He'd been there for 30 years and he'd see guys just starting out, and he saw the injustices there, and it used to really upset him. He'd try to encourage them. He would have been the first one to join a union, but he had a lot of kids so he couldn't risk anything. He was on his own most of the time I knew him. He was alone. My mother died while he was still a young guy, so it was just him and us.

We would caddie from the early spring to the late fall, and he was our bank. We'd give him the money and he'd give us enough to get through the next day or two for lunch and carfare, a movie, whatever. The rest went in the sock.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So, he didn't want you to become an actor?

**SHEEN:** He didn't, no. Well, television arrived and he was a big country-and-western fan. He used to love to watch the westerns. And we would fight all the time. I was in plays and I had made it known that I didn't want to go to college. But he'd saved money for me. He'd put a few bucks aside every week for me to go to college. And I would try to assure him, "Look, I'm making a living on the golf course, so what the hell? I'm not different than the lads. Let me go." "No, no. You're the one I'm worried about. You've got to work with your mind, not your body."

**READER'S DIGEST:** That's because of the arm?

**SHEEN:** Yes, because of the arm. It really bothered him.

**READER'S DIGEST:** But it sounds as if it bothered him more than you. I mean, did kids talk about it?

**SHEEN:** The brothers never talked about it.

**READER'S DIGEST:** The kids in school, did they ever joke?

**SHEEN:** No. But it kept me from being a professional athlete, because that's what I wanted to be. I was a very good athlete and I was a pretty good golfer, but it incapacitated me. I played basketball and all, [but] you knew I was right-handed and that was it. I couldn't switch to the left. I couldn't throw to the left. Nothing left-handed. So you just watch me for two minutes and then you've got me. I could fake to the left, but I still had to shoot right-handed. You knew that. So wherever I went, you slammed it back at me. It became real clear to me: This ain't going to happen. But I loved sports and I wasn't bad. I was a very fast runner. I played football in grade school. We went to this Catholic high school. They had the CYO leagues, and I played there. In high school, I got into the acting. James Dean came along, and after that I thought, Oh, wow, I've got a hero. I wanted to be like James Dean. Everybody did.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What was the first thing you saw of his?

**SHEEN:** *East of Eden*. And he was already dead. Didn't hear about him until he was gone.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So, anyway, you went to New York early '59?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, early '59.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And did your dad try to dissuade you?

**SHEEN:** I almost had to crawl over him to get out of the house! Finally, when he saw that I was determined, he blessed me. He used to write me in New York. I still have some of those early letters where he encouraged me. He never came to a play while I was in high school. I'd always keep tickets for him and he'd always, "Oh, honey, of course, I'm going to come." He'd never come.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Would he come to sports events?

**SHEEN:** No, nothing, because [he had so many kids and] he couldn't go for one and not the other. He'd leave for work 5:30 every morning. He'd go to Mass on Sunday. And a few years after my mother died, he started disappearing every Wednesday night. He'd be gone for exactly four hours. He would leave the house at 6:00 and be back by 10:00. Take a bus, put a hat on and a tie and coat, and he'd go out. Finally, one of the brothers, who was working as a busboy in a restaurant downtown, saw him and followed him. But he was very embarrassed. He didn't know where my father was going. He was going to a dance hall where he paid to dance. Ten cents a dance.

He never dated after [my mother died]. He got close once. There was a lady we knew he was fond of, but he couldn't bring her into that family. We would have killed her. So they could never be alone, they could have no relationship. But he used to go and dance. And we used to call it the old men's club. He'd never talk about it. He'd go there, and he loved to dance. He'd get all dapper. He'd put the perfume on, you know, he'd smell like — we knew he was going. We'd say, "Oh, he's going to the old men's club." We called it the old men's club, because all these old guys, widowers and bachelors would go down and pay to dance. There was a live orchestra. There was a ballroom downtown. It would have been the last place I would have thought of. We thought he was seeing someone. He'd come home alone. On the dot, he'd step off the bus. In the house at ten o'clock.

He was a remarkable man, but he kept it all inside. He'd rage in the house and never say a word outside because he was not proud of his accent. There were no other Spaniards around. He had this magnificent deep *basso profundo* voice. He'd tell stories, and it was better than going to the movies. Radio was big, and he could have been on the radio telling stories. When he spoke, you were quiet because you wanted to hear him. He didn't know how beloved he was. Outside, he'd meet an adult on the street and it was like, "Hello. Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am." He'd never engage, he'd never talk. Never. Just never spoke. He was not proud of his accent. He knew it distinguished him. It intimidated him. He just never felt at home there. He always talked about when he retired, he'd go home to Spain and finish out his life. And he retired in 1965. He went home and he lasted six months, then he couldn't wait to get back. His kids were here. It's a rough life back there. They lived in the mountains next to Portugal. That's where he came from, this little village. They had just gotten electricity. You had to walk everywhere. He never drove, never learned how to drive. He was a remarkable guy. It's interesting, but I don't want to take too much time.

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, it's fascinating.

**SHEEN:** One time my brothers and I were talking about our relationship with him as an adult. I didn't



see him for almost three years after I left home. He shrank in all that time. And after he died, I was talking to one of my brothers, who was my hero, my brother Mike, who was a very special guy. He died at age 47. I brought him out here to work for me. He had thrombosis and he got very sick. He lost a leg and finally died. He had several surgeries, putting veins in his body. His arms were a mess, scarred. He was a deeply spiritual man, and he rejoiced when I became a Catholic again. I'd been away for years. I came back a few months before he died, and he said, "You look all aglow. What is it with you?" I said, "I'm back in Mother Church." He said, "Oh. Welcome home." He was just sparkling. He knew I'd come home.

At any rate, we were talking one time, and he said, "How many times do you think you've seen Pop since you left home?" I said, "What, are you kidding? I used to talk to him all the time on the phone. I'd reroute my ticket from L.A. I'd go to New York to work. I'd always reroute it through Dayton on my way." He said, "Yeah, but how many times did you see him?" I started figuring it out. I saw him less than a dozen times. I figured it was between nine and ten times that I actually sat down and saw him, from the time I was 18 until he died, and I was 32 when he died. I never thought of it. Because you're on the phone, you write a letter — he was a big letter writer. He loved to write letters.

But the formation of my politics — I don't really have any politics, but I have a social conscience — that started to form when I was nine years old. I saw that there's this level [high] and this level [low], and there's a worse level. The blacks lived on the west side. I had friends over there and I would go over and see how they lived. Whew. And many of my friends — poor, Catholic, white — were prejudiced, without even knowing why. They told bad jokes, obscene jokes and racial jokes all the time. I stopped when I... my best friend was black and became my best man. We stayed friends all his life. And I began to realize it then, but, you know, they were a different class. They lived on the west side. We used the N-word. I'm horrified to admit it, but it's true. But my conscience was formed in a moral kind of frame of reference. I never had any great respect for the rich and certainly had no love for them.

**READER'S DIGEST:** No illusions.

**SHEEN:** No illusions. And even today, my wife, oh, she gives me the business, because if I'm with a wealthy person, I always pick up the check. I always go out of my way to pay my way. I don't want anything. And it's not right. I don't have any wealthy friends. I have a few friends who are actors who have made a substantial living, but you wouldn't call them wealthy. They still live on their earnings, like I do. But I just never, ever felt comfortable. I didn't really feel less than. I just felt different than. I had no education. I flunked out of high school. I went back, because my dad was furious. I went

back to summer school to get my degree and I was gone six months later. But I got it just for him.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Does it set one back as an actor out here if you don't play the game and hang around with rich people?

**SHEEN:** I think there's a conscious level of doing that.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do people do it?

**SHEEN:** They do it a lot. But I don't have any judgment on it. I really don't.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I'm just asking in general.

**SHEEN:** No, there are guys and gals who have really big, big careers. And they're projected, of course, in the level of projects they'll do, their studio movies. And it falls into their private life, which is really public, of what they will do politically. You'll see them do, you know, ads, PSAs [public service announcements] for cancer and heart disease and that sort of thing. That's why I don't do any of those. I go to the ones that can't get anybody else.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Where it's a matter of taking a risk?

**SHEEN:** Exactly. Unions, health care, social justice...

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you know of specific cases in your life where you really have made a sacrifice by doing those things, where you've lost roles?

**SHEEN:** I don't know specifically. My associations are mainly with people in social justice work, people who run homeless kitchens and live in the ghetto and serve in churches primarily that serve the poor and the Hispanic and black populations. Those are most of my friends. Dr. Devita Cody is a Third World doctor who's educated at Columbia, who has no practice here except at the clinics, who helped found the Venice Family Clinic here, and also founded the San Carlos Foundation in Berkeley. And I'm a member of that. And we serve the Hispanic Third World. We send people into the Hispanic Third World to bring knowledge into the most remote areas to the poorest of the poor.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And also, without it being the purpose, doesn't it help you as an actor, because you're seeing all sorts of different sides of life...

**SHEEN:** Absolutely.

**READER'S DIGEST:** ...and not just living in a gilded ghetto?

**SHEEN:** The good thing about being an actor is that you're forced to be exposed. A lot of my work has been done in the Third World. We were in the Philippines for *Apocalypse Now*. I was in India for *Gandhi*. I was forced to go to these places I ordinarily would not have gone. I certainly wouldn't go as a tourist to a Third World country, but I was forced to go and stay while I worked. And so, you want to check your values, you go to India, spend a few weeks in India just wandering around. [Doing so] will have a profound effect on you. I took my kids in there as well. The education they were getting in the Third World was remarkable.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did it help that you saw other sides of life that made the things that people in Hollywood normally obsess about seem rather trivial?

**SHEEN:** Yes, very much so. And very practically, for my own personal journey. After *Apocalypse Now* I got ill over there and nearly died. And I had to re-evaluate my life. I had a drinking problem, and I had to come to grips with that. Also I had not been a Catholic for many years, so the children were not raised Catholic. They had no spiritual values. They had moral values, they were good people, but they never had the education or the training for moral behavior. And that was showing up. They had nothing to fall back on. That bothered me a great deal.

And after *Apocalypse* my career shot up and suddenly I'm getting a lot of offers and my life is changing in a lot of ways. But I was fragmented. I was three sheets to the wind. I was a father here...

**READER'S DIGEST:** This was before the heart attack?

**SHEEN:** Yeah. Yeah. And I'm a father here and an actor here and I'm all these different things. So I went on — for lack of a better word — a journey to try and unite all these parts of myself. And it culminated in '81 in Paris, where I became a Catholic. But I came back out of love and need rather than fear and trembling.

**READER'S DIGEST:** This is when you began to recover from the heart attack?

**SHEEN:** Yeah. In '81.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Was there a sudden revelation?

**SHEEN:** It was a cumulative thing. And it ended in Paris. I just came back from India and I was really knocked down. None of the lads would go [to Paris]. Emilio went with me for a few weeks, but he had to go back home. I was on my own. And I got a job right after Paris. In fact, I was in Paris when I got the job, but the phone connection was so bad I could never get it clear. "Is it on? Is it off?" So I kind of waited. I thought, It can't be any big deal. By the time I got home, they were looking for me. They said, "You're supposed to be in Paris." I said, "Oh, God," on this little film that I promised to do and I didn't think would happen, and now it's happening and I had a commitment. So Janet couldn't go, the kids were in school. She said, "Go. We'll catch up with you at Easter vacation," which was a few months away. I said, "Oh, God."

It was winter in Paris. I went, and I was very depressed. Delighted to have a big job, but I was doing it for the money and getting it over with. And I ran into Terrence Malick, who was the director of *Badlands*, which had a profound effect on my life. Terry was now living in Paris as kind of an expatriate. He's a very shy man and very deeply spiritual. I always admired him, but I didn't really know him well enough. We got reacquainted, and he became my mentor. I spent every waking hour with Terry. When I wasn't working, I was with him. Talking all night, walking — he showed me Paris on foot or on the underground. I loved Paris. Over the months that I was there with him, he knew something was going on with me, and he knew how to direct that. Although he's younger than I am, he's a genius. He's a Rhodes scholar and all. Just this brilliant man. But he was also this deeply sensitive man. He was on his own spiritual journey. And he wasn't Catholic. He was Christian. He knew where I was headed. So he'd give me literature, a book here and a thing there. We'd talk and talk and talk, and he became like a father confessor to me. So one day, the last book he gave me was *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Dostoyevsky. I couldn't stop reading it. It took me about a week to finish it, and at the end of reading that book, the realization was that I was really in need of a faith, of a grounding, that I was really still a Catholic, that I was in love with the idea of Catholicism, that I needed it in my life, and that I must return. So I went back to Catholicism.

As I told you, my brother saw it in me. I went back in Paris. I was starting to go to a little church, which was near where I was living, an English-speaking church with largely American people from the embassy, and Filipino people. I love Filipino people, and they all knew me from the Philippines. They were diplomatic or, you know, people working in Europe. Filipinos, very Catholic family people. So I love this community. One day, May Day, 1981 — because I remember I was off, it was a big

holiday in Europe — I went down to the church. I pounded on the door. The priest came and I said, “I’ve been gone for a long time. I want to come home.” He said, “You come on Saturday and you better be early because I’ve got a wedding at four o’clock. We’ll look after you.” Sure enough he did, and I’ve been a Catholic ever since. The next 20 years were the most difficult of my life, but by far the happiest. Because I came back to the church of Mother Teresa and Dan Berrigan and Dorothy Day, and I began to get involved in the social justice issues almost immediately.

**READER’S DIGEST:** There is that big Catholic tradition of...

**SHEEN:** Service. Service.

**READER’S DIGEST:** And also social change.

**SHEEN:** Social change, social justice. The Jesuits. Dan Berrigan, wow. Changed my life. I met him in June 1981.

**READER’S DIGEST:** Why were the next 20 years the most difficult?

**SHEEN:** Because I knew that religion — particularly Catholicism — if it’s real, cannot be a sometime thing. It can’t be a Sunday thing. Reverend King said, “The church is the place to go forth from.” Do you remember when they tried to stop him? Even his fellow preachers said, “Hey, man, what you doing in the streets?” He said, “We’ve got to take what we believe to the streets. If it has moral value, we have to live it and lead.” And I was deeply influenced by that. The people that I admired in my faith were not the hierarchy. We had had Pope John XXIII, who changed the world.

**READER’S DIGEST:** Too briefly.

**SHEEN:** Yeah, but he was the image, you know. And although the church was — and still remains — extremely conservative, the body of the church is the people. The majority of the people who are Catholic are poor. It’s Third World. So I was going home. I was going back where I started.

But I was going home, not from something that was given and I didn’t appreciate, but to something I chose. I came back out of love, not fear — big difference. I wasn’t so much interested — and I’m still not interested — so much in religion as I am in spirituality. For me, religion is not the end. It is not God. It can be the road. But even that, you know, is very difficult. I was praying that our church would condemn the violence in Afghanistan and not give the imprimatur to the war and remain non-

violent, as Jesus was. And they did not. But still we have to go on. Dan Berrigan goes on, Bishop Gumbleton... all of the real people who work for social justice and social change. I knew these guys personally since the early 1980s. The guys who were involved in the sanctuary movement were going to prison. Guys who were protesting the SOA [School of the Americas] were going to prison. Guys who were protesting nuclear arms and the buildup, were going to prison. These were my friends. Dan Berrigan just got out of prison. I visited him there.

**READER'S DIGEST:** But what do you say to some guy who writes you and says, to respond to 9/11 with nonviolence means that the violent people take over the earth?

**SHEEN:** Well, I don't. I wish I did. I wrote a prayer the day of the attack. It's on my door here. It says, "Let us pray. First, let us choose our enemy well, for he is who we will become. Therefore, let us not pray for vengeance. For surely only darkness and despair are the gods of such idolatry. Rather, let us pray for justice and that we may become worthy of the long- promised blessing reserved for the merciful. Amen." That's my prayer. I didn't make up the rules, do you know what I'm saying? It breaks my heart that they're bringing these kids home in boxes, these American kids. It breaks my heart. I look at the families on TV and I'm heartbroken.

[And something else that] breaks my heart. No one is mourning the faceless Afghan children who died. Does that make up for 9/11? Would any of the victims of 9/11 want to be remembered in vengeance or an eye for an eye? I don't think so. Not the stories I'm hearing about who they were, where they came from, what they stood for. Not from their families, I'm not hearing it. I'm not saying I have the answer, but I did not make the rules. "You will become your enemy if you choose to." I only have one enemy. That's me. I'm the only one that I fight to change and I have very little success. The bottom line is, I don't know anything. I believe a lot of things. Do they work? I haven't really had enough faith to move that mountain. Someone said we shouldn't be critical of Christianity. We've never tried it. Christ was killed because he was a rebel. They didn't kill him because he was a nice guy. He was a troublemaker. He was changing the law, the letter of the law, because he changed the heart.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, just as Martin Luther King was — and is now — remembered as this polite...

**SHEEN:** He was a troublemaker. He'd change your life. If you want to follow this guy, it's going to cost you. If it doesn't cost you anything, you have to question its value. Anything in life is measured in that, don't you think? One time I was talking like this and Ramon was very quiet, listening and lis-

tening. And the person left the room and Ramon said to the person as they were leaving, “You know, he thinks he was always like this.” Because he knows me. Ramon knows me.

**READER’S DIGEST:** I’d like to get biographical again. When you went to New York in ’59, what did...

**SHEEN:** Ramon doesn’t know that. I told him I went in ’69. ’59. I told him I’m 51.

**READER’S DIGEST:** All right, then it was ’69. We’ll revise this for Ramon.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION ABOUT PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON]

**READER’S DIGEST:** I’ll trade you. I’ll send you the first set of Johnson tapes before...

**SHEEN:** I’d love to have the book [you wrote about him, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson’s Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965*].

**READER’S DIGEST:** I’ll send you both.

**SHEEN:** I’d love to read the book, because it was almost apparent to me that you were working from a script when you were speaking [on the radio]. You had to be because it was so specific. And you had so much material, I figured you’d already done it. But I didn’t know until you were on the air. I listened to it all the way home. I was so thrilled. But I was only aware that it was a book at that time. The only book you mentioned was her diary, Mrs. Johnson’s diary. LBJ did not want the tapes ever heard until the year 2020, right?

**READER’S DIGEST:** At least. And you can imagine how he would cringe if he heard a lot of this played on the radio.

**SHEEN:** Yeah, he probably would. But that’s okay. He should.

**READER’S DIGEST:** Oh, absolutely.

**SHEEN:** But if I was his son, I would say, “I think the world knows who I know and love.”

**READER’S DIGEST:** They all do, and Mrs. Johnson does, too — even the stuff that he would have

cringed about.

**SHEEN:** But he was such a skinflint. He's crawling up a guy one day — oh, it was embarrassing. And he's trying to get some clothes from this haberdashery in Austin or Houston or somewhere. And he's saying, "Now, I'm a man of simple means." He's the President.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Fourteen million dollars net worth at the time...

**SHEEN:** And he's giving the guy over the phone his sizes and telling him how they should fit.

**READER'S DIGEST:** This is where he said, "The crotch is like riding a wire fence."

**SHEEN:** Yes, it's so embarrassing. He uses vulgar language. But he uses it in a very offhand way.

He was just so country, and honest. And you love him. The most striking conversation is the one he has on the phone with his wife. Lady Bird is calling him to criticize his behavior at a press conference early in his Presidency. Was it his first one?

**READER'S DIGEST:** It was one of the first.

**SHEEN:** Now, remember, JFK has just been killed, man. The country is unfocused. And she calls him, and says, "Well now, darling, I just want to say some things about the press conference." "Oh, yes, darling, what's that?" "Well, your gestures were just a bit too big. On the wide shots they seem to be fine, but darling, you've got to watch it in the close shots. Your hand..."

And you know what he's saying? "Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, I guess you're right about it. Well, you know, I didn't quite know what I..." He was like a schoolchild and this was the teacher. At one point, she calls him "my beloved" in offhand conversation. "Well, I'll see you at noon then, my beloved." "Yes." And then, at another point, she calls him "my betrothed." Just offhand. Just, "Okay, my betrothed," she says to him. It so endeared me to her.

I'll tell you a little story if you don't mind. The only time I met her. [Talking to son Ramon] You were just a baby, but Grandpa came to New York after he retired. He was going home, and it was in the summer of '65.

**READER'S DIGEST:** This is your dad.



**SHEEN:** Yeah, my dad. He stayed with us at our apartment on West 86<sup>th</sup> Street. It was a very hot summer night. At any rate, earlier in the week, I went to work on a Monday. We had Sunday off. I went to work on Monday and they said, "Now, when you come to work on Tuesday night, make sure you have ID, because the place is going to be [crawling] with Secret Service. The First Lady is coming and she's bringing one of her daughters. So everyone has to be screened." I got all excited, because I had tickets that night for my dad to see the performance [I was in]. It would have been the first time my dad had ever seen me onstage. And so I was very excited. Uncle Mike was there and Aunt Carmen was there. And I ran home and I said, "Oh, Pop, guess who's going to be in the audience tomorrow night?" "Who's that?" he said. "The First Lady is coming and bringing one of the children." "Oh, I'm no go in there. Oh, no, honey." He always called me honey. He called all of us honey. Men who were adults, honey. That's why I call you guys honey. So he said... [Gets interrupted.] Yes. How you doing?

**MALE VOICE:** Good. Can I introduce you to someone?

**SHEEN:** Come in, please.

**MALE VOICE:** This is Greg. [He] won a scriptwriting contest to come visit our set for a week.

**SHEEN:** Really.

**MALE VOICE:** What a pleasure to met you.

**SHEEN:** What's your name?

**MALE VOICE:** Greg Kaufman.

**SHEEN:** Greg, how are you? This is my son Ramon. This is Michael, who's doing an interview for a magazine. Michael is a historian who's writing for *Reader's Digest* now, but he's got this book out, bestseller right now as we speak.

**MALE VOICE:** Is that right?

**SHEEN:** He did the tapes. Did you happen to hear that?

**MALE VOICE:** Have I seen you on McNeil-Lehrer?

**SHEEN:** He's the guy.

**MALE VOICE:** He's good.

**SHEEN:** He's wonderful.

**MALE VOICE:** You're good.

**SHEEN:** And he's come to interview me. And you are... come in, please.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Hi. I'm Hani [phonetic].

**SHEEN:** Ronnie?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Hani.

**SHEEN:** This is my son, Ramon. And this is Michael. And you are?

**MALE VOICE:** I'm Jeremy.

**SHEEN:** Jeremy, say hello to Michael.

**SHEEN:** You went to Amherst?

**MALE VOICE:** Yes, I did.

**SHEEN:** In Boston. I spoke there one time.

**MALE VOICE:** I remember seeing you.

**SHEEN:** You were there!

**MALE VOICE:** I saw you a couple years ago...

**SHEEN:** You know who I was working with when I went there? Ted Demme. He was directing a movie. Yes, I worked with him. He just died. Yeah. And Dennis Leary said, "I can't go over there. Can you fill for me?" He went to school there. And I went over and they treated me just wonderfully. I spoke there and had a great time. I had no idea where it was. It was right down the Common, right off the Common. I thought it was going to be a big campus like Yale or Harvard.

**MALE VOICE:** Very small.

**SHEEN:** It's a wonderful place. Good memories from there. So you guys, where are you from? What college?

**MALE VOICE:** I'm from D.C.

**SHEEN:** He's from D.C. You live there, right?

**READER'S DIGEST:** I do.

**MALE VOICE:** I went to college — I graduated a while ago.

**SHEEN:** Where? From where?

**MALE VOICE:** Dickinson College.

**SHEEN:** Dickinson.

**MALE VOICE:** And then graduate school in Ohio.

**SHEEN:** I'm from Dayton.

**MALE VOICE:** Are you?

**SHEEN:** Yes, I am.

**MALE VOICE:** How long have you been away?

**SHEEN:** Oh, I left in '59. A long time ago. Yeah. I didn't go to college. I used to go down to Ohio

University in Athens for [what we called] the NFL — the National Forensic League. I tell everyone I played in the NFL. I used to travel for speech tournaments. Ramon was in it in high school. I got in it because James Dean was in it. I read one time in a magazine that he was in the NFL. I thought, How do I get into that? So I joined the NFL. We used to travel all over the state and went to the nationals one year. It was great. Miami was big for athletics. The coaches that came out of there...

**MALE VOICE:** Eubank.

**SHEEN:** Wayne Eubank.

**MALE VOICE:** And...

**SHEEN:** And the Notre Dame coach who just got... Who was the great coach that got them finally to a national championship?

**MALE VOICE:** South Carolina. What's his name?

**SHEEN:** Oh, how soon we forget. His son's name is Skip. What's his name? Where did you go to school?

**FEMALE VOICE:** I actually go to UCLA right now.

**SHEEN:** Oh, you are?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yeah.

**SHEEN:** Are you in film department over there?

**FEMALE VOICE:** I guess.

**SHEEN:** You write any scripts? You won a contest.

**FEMALE VOICE:** No, I didn't. I actually am an intern here.

**SHEEN:** You are?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** Since when? I haven't seen you, have I?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yeah, I've been here since September.

**SHEEN:** Oh, my God. What does that show you? Where am I? Don't be offended. I don't know the cast's names half the time. Well, so you're a regular. Are you still studying?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** Good. What are you studying?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Education.

**SHEEN:** Oh, you're going to be a teacher? Good for you. Did you happen to watch *Oprah* the other night? They had the teacher of the year. Did you see that guy? This is a true — honest to God, I worked that night. I couldn't go home because I had to work early the next morning. They get me a hotel room, I'm up, I'm smoking, I'm watching TV, I'm going around. And she comes on late at night. I didn't know she was on at one o'clock in the morning. It's a rerun, right? "And now, our teacher of the year." Seventy thousand applicants competed and this guy won. They bring him on and they show this documentary on this guy. He's from North Carolina. He's white, tall — he looks like a long-distance runner. This handsome, gangly kid with this great bubbly personality. He talks, like, all over the place and can't sit still. Very engaging personality. He's watching a news program. One of the news networks did a story on a school in Harlem and how bad it was. It was toward the end of the school year in North Carolina, and he said, "I've got to go there." But he didn't get the name of the school. He just knew it was in Harlem. He retired from the system in North Carolina, packed his bags. The last day of school, packed his car, drove to New York City, found Harlem. He'd never, ever been to New York in his life. He's driving around Harlem looking for the school building, because he can't remember the name of the school. He's driving around and he sees a fight going on in the playground between this adult and this big teenager. They're into it, struggling. Did you hear this story?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, not at all.

**SHEEN:** They're struggling, and he goes in and breaks it up. He stops the fight and he talks to the

boy for two hours and makes a friend. And the boy said, "If I had a teacher like you, wow." He said, "What grade are you in?" He told him, and he said, "How would you like me for your teacher?" It just takes your breath away. And he didn't know the name of the school. He went in to see the principal. He said, "I'm from North Carolina. Here are my credentials. I saw this program, and this kid here, and I think this is where I belong." And they said, "Where do you want to teach?" And he said, "Well, here. I want his grade." They said, "His grade loses a teacher on average [every] three months. Some of them have been ten weeks." He said, "Well, that's where I'm going to go."

He said, "Give me a list of all the children in the class." So they did. He spent the whole summer visiting every child and their family. He said, "Now, these are my rules. And this is what I expect of every student." He's a mathematics teacher. And there are not many math geniuses that come out of Harlem, right? They don't expect it. He did. And he said, "These are my rules. You think you can follow it?" And they said, "You bet." And he became friends with the parents. He started the school year, they won't let him go now. He's like a free agent. And they showed him in class [on the Oprah show]. He eats with the students. He's on the playground. They taught him how to dance. And so he does the funky chicken.

**FEMALE VOICE:** I saw that.

**SHEEN:** Did you see it?

**FEMALE VOICE:** That was so funny.

**SHEEN:** Dancing with them! And this one little girl... the students talk about it. And this one little girl, this little black girl with... did you see her?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yeah. I saw part of the episode.

**SHEEN:** These are like eighth graders? Would you say about eighth grade?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** They're 13 years old.

**FEMALE VOICE:** She was a little younger than that.

**SHEEN:** All right. Eleven. Seventh grade was his class. He had that big thug in his class, the one he broke up the fight with. And this little girl starts talking about him, and she says, “No one ever cared for me. I never had a ‘teacher’ ”— she used the term — “who knew what was in my heart. And he saw what was in my heart. And I hated him. He was white and he was bright and he was from the South, all the things I’m supposed to hate,” she said. “But I can’t stop loving this man. He’s changed me.” She starts to weep uncontrollably.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Everybody in the audience was just falling over.

**SHEEN:** Now, that part ended, and they bring the guy on live. He comes bouncing out, “Hey, how you doing? Hi, Oprah. I’m so excited.” He can’t sit down. He got up and danced. He’s talking about everything. It was breathtaking. Seventy thousand candidates and they chose this guy.

The lady after him, a Spanish teacher, a black Spanish teacher in Harlem, she was in the audience. She was runner-up. She was teacher of the year as well, but in the nationals she was behind him. She was a black teacher in Washington, D.C., in a ghetto neighborhood, and she taught Spanish. She had the same kind of thing. She made them Spanish food, and dance Spanish dances. There was no English spoken in the class. And they showed her in class, running the class in Spanish. (Ramon speaks Spanish. I don’t speak a word.) And they interview this one very tough-looking black kid. He looked about 17 — these kids were seniors. And they said, “Well, what about her? How did you learn to speak Spanish?” “Oh, I speak Spanish. Of course I do,” he said. “How did you learn?” “Well, as soon as I got that A,E,I,O,U down, I got it.” She had them down, man. She was a big lady. But that just took my breath away. I thought, Wow. They got it right about heroes. We did a PSA for teachers: Be a teacher, be a hero.

So, you’re writing a screenplay or you’ve written one?

**MALE VOICE:** Yeah. This one I’ve written, I’ve been writing for a while. And I think I just found an independent producer for it.

**SHEEN:** Good for you.

**MALE VOICE:** I’m hoping. I’m hopeful. Nothing’s signed, sealed and delivered, but I’m hopeful.

**SHEEN:** You’re from Ohio?

**MALE VOICE:** No, I'm from D.C. I went to Ohio for grad school and stuck around for a while, actually. I was there for four or five years. Five years. Nice people. Gets a little slow...

**SHEEN:** The Buckeyes.

**FEMALE VOICE:** I'm originally from Cleveland, Ohio.

**SHEEN:** You are? My wife's from Cleveland. She grew up downtown. Her grandfather worked for Republic Steel. She took me back there. The house is still there. Did you know that? We went there. Well, Ramon knows everybody back there.

Are you going to be working with us or are you just visiting?

**MALE VOICE:** I am visiting, but I'm going to be on the set. Tomorrow, right?

**MALE VOICE:** Yes.

**MALE VOICE:** Are you going to be on the set?

**SHEEN:** No, not tomorrow. I'm doing *Spin City*. I'm going with a winner.

**MALE VOICE:** Yeah, that was exciting, and congratulations on your [Golden Globe] nomination and congratulations to Charlie [who won].

**SHEEN:** You know, I damn near fainted, I got so excited. I was backstage when he got called. I couldn't believe it. I almost danced across the stage. I don't do that. I danced backstage and went around and met him on the other side. They said he's coming off on the other side. So I danced back the other way. I almost fainted with excitement. I was walking back to the table, and I passed Kelsey Grammer and all the guys that were nominated, and I said, "I had nothing to do with it, man." I turned around and I bumped into Kiefer Sutherland. What are you going to do?

Well, I'm delighted to meet you.

**MALE VOICE:** I'm delighted to meet you. I'm really an admirer of your work.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You've played Bobby Kennedy...



**SHEEN:** You know who told me about him in reverential terms was Pierre Salinger. They were friends.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yes, he was closer to Bobby than to Jack.

**SHEEN:** Very close. And I met Pierre... remember, we were in Paris doing that film. He helped us out with an immigration problem with one of our cast. And then he said, "Can we have dinner?" And I met him in a restaurant and I was so delighted. Did you know Pierre?

**READER'S DIGEST:** A little bit.

**SHEEN:** He was working for ABC96 I (I met hst. An, he was ssweebitW96 lw he tis w intnd tre)Tj 8..395 -18

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you don't become President by accident. He wanted it. He was even disappointed when they turned him down four years earlier for Vice President. I mean, they worked for it, they earned it, and they paid dearly for it.

It's hard to imagine the shape of the culture that I grew up in without them, particularly Bobby. The hope [he had, even though] it was in the middle of a war. He was against it, and he was going to be the next President. He had passion and love — and little children, he was still having little children like his brother did. Children were born in the White House. They were young and vital, and they were idealistic. They were also very politically savvy. They grew up in a political house. This was what they did. This was their service.

You look at his children today. They're all involved in social justice. I saw Robert when he'd just gotten out of jail, and his mother, so proud and yet so humble. All the children we met over there, they're now adults and involved in service. Every one of those children is working in some social justice medium, giving something back. That's a reflection of who this guy was, where he came from, what he stood for. That's who he was. I love that family.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What does it also tell you about what's happened in the system that we use to choose Presidents and, nowadays, where you have to raise \$100 million before you run?

**SHEEN:** Well, it's obviously flawed, deeply, deeply flawed. No question about it. The other side of it is, once Bobby Kennedy was asked what he thought of the character or the level of individuality in the U.S. Senate when he was there. I can only paraphrase, but he said something like, "Well, you know, you could go around the country and personally pick them out. Whether you're a liberal or a Democrat, Republican, didn't matter."

**READER'S DIGEST:** People with character.

**SHEEN:** Yes. And he says, "You probably wouldn't get a better group. You'd probably choose a very similar kind of people."

**READER'S DIGEST:** What do you think he'd say nowadays?

**SHEEN:** I think he would have had a great deal to do with legislation that stops a lot of the... he would have been in John McCain's corner. I think he would have initiated such a thing a long time before that, when it started to become so evident...

**READER'S DIGEST:** That money got...

**SHEEN:** ...that you can damn near buy this office. You still got to have a public. You still have to respond. You still have to be somebody. And you better be somebody special, in tenacity alone. Can you imagine? A guy like Ronald Reagan could push aside a George Bush and get the nomination, an actor?

**READER'S DIGEST:** How do you think that happened?

**SHEEN:** Sheer personality.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And is that because TV is so important nowadays?

**SHEEN:** It is the most important. It's sound bites now. We don't always get the full picture even when you're watching it happen. We watched it over and over, films of November 22. We're still not certain who killed him or why.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Are we in danger because TV is so important, of a candidate who is terrifically polished on TV and gives the impression of being sincere, who's able to give a good performance and get nominated and only later do you find out...

**SHEEN:** Well, it would seem so, but there are so many elements that have to come into play. Your past is scrutinized and you're vetted more now — as Mr. Bush found out. They dug up an old drunk-driving arrest. I mean, you'd think he would have buried that running for governor, in Texas, right? And there it would have done the least amount of damage. But he squared it. He addressed it. The worst thing to do if you want something to hang around, is ignore it. It will grow like a virus. But I don't know, man. There's so many elements now, and I'm surprised by all of them. Some of the issues that pop up that suddenly become so important. The principal one is the economy. That hasn't changed much. And I think Mr. Bush is going to have his problems. He could knock out all the terrorists in the world and we could feel as secure as Harry. But if the economy's in the toilet when he's trying to win again, he's going to have some problems. I don't care who the Democrats throw at him. The Republicans could go after him as well.

**READER'S DIGEST:** It's not impossible.

**SHEEN:** That's the whole thing, is the uncertainty of it. But the television, the image, wow. That's big-time. It's so big-time. I can't even calculate it.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you think there are a lot of good people who could be good Presidents who are now getting screened out?

**SHEEN:** Oh, absolutely. Women, as well. One of the worst things you can be in public life, if you're successful, is to be smart. I think Mrs. Clinton was criticized because she was so damn smart and she didn't keep it to home. She let them know. She came out for the health care in that first term. She was in the forefront and suddenly she took such a beating. She had to retreat — because of him. I mean, she didn't want to damage him. And he was a very popular President. But they didn't want to think that his wife was running the show. As if she stopped being his wife when he got elected, for God's sake.

I remember the night he was elected. He was in Little Rock and he came out just after he'd won. And one of the anchors — I think it was Tom Brokaw — said he looked so different.

**READER'S DIGEST:** You mean after being elected?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, just elected, a couple of hours. And his campaign manager, what's that wonderful guy's name?

**READER'S DIGEST:** James Carville.

**SHEEN:** James Carville said, "He hasn't changed. We have. We look at him differently."

**READER'S DIGEST:** We looked at him in a different way.

**SHEEN:** We do, yeah. It's the office. The office is so revered. You can criticize him for days, as long as you're an American. Let someone else open their mouth outside the country, we take it personally. Because he's the only federally elected officer we've got. He's the only representative we really have.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And it's also woven into our genetic code.

**SHEEN:** It belongs to us. We invented it. It's ours. And we're going to determine how it's going to be

presented. Thank you very much, we'll take care of ourselves. And a lot of people resent that around the world, but it is the most powerful office in the world, economically, politically, militarily. If you're not friends with the United States, you've got a lot of enemies. And that guy, whoever he is, he can project himself one way on the world stage. It doesn't mean a hill of beans if he doesn't project himself on this stage, on the local stage. It's fascinating. The institution is absolutely fascinating. Although it's woven by the personality of the men that have occupied the office, and it's demanded by the Constitution, still, it has a life of its own.

Is this the scene?

**MALE VOICE:** You've got to stop talking now and work.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, my. I've got actually only one left on this. Have you got like one minute more?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, for sure.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Anyway, last quick question I've got. It strikes me that having the role that you've got on this program, and you get mail and people talk to you and you hear all sorts of things, is there anything you've learned about this country that you didn't know before you had this role?

**SHEEN:** No. I'll tell you, the only thing that surprised me was the reaction to the show. We honestly thought, that is, those of us who started the show, that it was too good for network television, meaning that the average TV viewer would never buy into it. And so that was the most gratifying and surprising thing, is that not only did it have an audience, it had a big audience.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So what does it say that there was a big audience for it?

**SHEEN:** It was very gratifying.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What does it say about the American people?

**SHEEN:** It was very gratifying that politics was not a sometime thing. They really did care. If they got information, they followed up. That they were deeply concerned about major issues.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That they would respond to something that showed in a hopeful, optimistic

way what politics could be.

**SHEEN:** Very much so. The overall feeling is that many people are inspired by the show. A lot of young people are getting interested in public life because of the show that may not have been otherwise. We don't know. We like to think that we had an influence there, that we made people feel it was an honorable profession to be a bureaucrat, to be a servant for your country. And that's saying a lot today, because most people are not that interested in politics or politicians. Not patriotism, but the day to day business of running the country didn't always interest most people. They had their lives, and they didn't feel they could count on the government.

You know, when I started, the President was not the central character. It was the staff.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I remember.

**SHEEN:** They weren't going to deal with the First Family or the guy or the Oval Office. I came in to play the pilot, and when you agree to do a pilot, you have to make your deal for the whole series. In case it goes, you can't hold them up. So my deal called for one appearance every four weeks, and I was happy with that. I did the pilot, and I was very pleased with it. When I started playing, I had a preconceived notion of what a President should be like in private, because all we deal with, basically, is the private life.

So I had an attitude about how to play it. Tommy Schlamme came — he directed the pilot. He's the best. He's the glue of this whole thing. I mean, Aaron [Sorkin] writes the words, but Tommy puts them through us. His vision and his ensemble work is just magnificent. I'm sorry you didn't get to meet him. Maybe you'll meet Tommy if you stick around. I'd love you to meet him, because he's the guy who turned me on to LBJ.

At any rate, I was playing this thing, and he took me aside at one point early in the scene and he said, "Martin, I just want to tell you one thing. You do not have to play a President. Everyone around you is going to play you as the President, treat you like the President. You be yourself." I said, "Oh, my."

**READER'S DIGEST:** Is it by coincidence that you wound up playing so many political leaders in your career?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, I think so.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Really?

**SHEEN:** It was certainly not by design. I've played a couple of villains too. I played a Presidential aspirant in *The Dead Zone*, and I've played the odd politician here and there. But — actually I've played Bobby Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That was the first time I saw you.

**SHEEN:** Is that right?

**READER'S DIGEST:** *The Missiles of October*.

**SHEEN:** He was my hero. I was a volunteer for him when he ran for the Senate.

**READER'S DIGEST:** In New York?

**SHEEN:** Yeah. I was on Broadway at the time.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What were you doing that fall?

**SHEEN:** *The Subject Was Roses*.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That was that fall.

**SHEEN:** Yes. And he was running for the Senate, of course. And they came to me one day and said, "Would you attend a rally at Madison Square Garden?" This is the old Madison Square Garden. It was on 50<sup>th</sup> and Eighth Avenue. They were having a big rally on Sunday afternoon.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Johnson also came, right?

**SHEEN:** He may have been there before I got there. So I said, "I have a matinee. I can't get there until late." They said, "Whenever you can show up will be fine." I said, "I really want to meet Bobby Kennedy." They said, "We'll make sure." So I got to the event after the matinee. I guess I got there around four o'clock. They put me right up on a podium, right up there on the dais. There were a bunch of folding chairs and a lectern unit. He came in about 20 minutes after I got there. He'd been

campaigning all day, and he came in and the place was jammed up. They had 50,000 people there that day. It was astonishing. Everybody who was anybody in politics was there, speaking. They were all running for something. Kenneth Keating was there. He was the incumbent. And Mayor Wagner and John Lindsay... no, he didn't come in till the next year, but he was...

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, he was a Congressman.

**SHEEN:** A Congressman at that time, yes. He's the only Republican I ever worked for. But as soon as he got in office he became a Democrat. I liked him a lot.

**READER'S DIGEST:** He died a few months ago.

**SHEEN:** Is Mary still living, his wife?

**READER'S DIGEST:** I think she is, but I think she's not well.

**SHEEN:** Really? They were a great couple. He was a very dynamic but very down-to-earth guy. Everybody adored him. He should have stayed in Congress.

**READER'S DIGEST:** It would have been the best for him.

**SHEEN:** Yeah.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Who was the first politician you knew well?

**SHEEN:** You mean really knew?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** Bill Clinton. He's been so friendly to me. And I feel like I'm bragging, but I adore him. I did some ads for him when he first ran. You know, I did voice-overs for his campaign.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That was in '92?

**SHEEN:** Yes, first term. But I never met him until we were doing the show. No, no, I beg your pardon. I did a PBS special at the White House during his first term, and he hosted it. It was a fund-



raiser, 25 years of public television, National Public Radio.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Right. '95.

**SHEEN:** Were you there?

**READER'S DIGEST:** I wasn't, but that was that spring after Gingrich won, do you remember, and they were trying...

**SHEEN:** Yes. Contract on America. God almighty, what happened to them? He hosted it, and she was there, of course. We did a series of skits in the East Room, and Bette Midler sang. Oh, there were a lot of wonderful people. We practiced just that day. We had a working script. We did a lot of skits about the White House, various Presidents, and he couldn't have been kinder. You know, when you get with the President, no matter who it is, I guess, or all the ones I've met, you don't want to take up their time. He was happy as Larry. He loved the actors, he loved what we were doing. I remember one of the Presidents I had played that night was Teddy Roosevelt. That's one of his heroes, and I didn't know that. When I was on the receiving line afterward to meet him, he said, "Oh, I like so much your Teddy Roosevelt. Did you know that his son won the Congressional Medal of Honor at Normandy?" And I said, "Oh, my. I didn't know that." And I'm looking behind me already, you know. And he went on and on. Just in casual conversation about Teddy Roosevelt. I'd been a fan before that, but I never thought he'd ever spend a minute with me.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How did the relationship grow?

**SHEEN:** Through the show. We got word through his staff when press secretary Dee Dee Myers came on our show the first year. She was there at the start. She began to tell us that he was watching and was very interested and wished us well and was curious about the show, and said he liked it because we were so optimistic. We made bureaucrats people. We gave them a face and a heart and compassion and humanity, which no show had ever done before. He was absolutely right. He loved the show, and we'd get notes occasionally, Christmas cards. Then we went to the White House. We went his last... the big thing where the press beats him up. What do they call that?

**READER'S DIGEST:** The Gridiron.

**SHEEN:** Not that, but everybody in the audience is...

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, the White House Correspondents Dinner.

**SHEEN:** Correspondents Dinner. And I sat with Marlin Fitzwater, who told me some funny stories about the other guys. And he insisted on meeting us in a private room.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Where, at the Hilton?

**SHEEN:** At the hotel, yes.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And what was that like?

**SHEEN:** Well, it was breathtaking. And you were there, Ramon, remember? And [when] he came into the room, the room lit up. I was talking to Greenspan. He was telling me about his work and so forth, and he was a big fan of the show. Suddenly the room just, boom. There was nobody else in the room. He came in. The Old Man came in with the First Lady. And all the energy just went there. The room just stopped, didn't it? Every focus just turned to him. You knew he was in the room. You knew who it was instantly. Every conversation just went silent. Everyone gravitated. And I was a little shy. I didn't want to walk away from the conversation. Eventually they said, you better get over here. He wants you in the picture. So I went over and I met him. I didn't realize how tall he was, because when I met him before, I don't know why, I was just so nervous. But now I was really observing him, and I realized how handsome he was and how he worked a room. He was magic. And remember what he did? Hillary was still talking to someone and he started yelling. "Hillary, come on over here. We're going to get this picture. Hillary, come on over here." It was embarrassing. We were like, "Oh, God, poor Hillary." You know, he's yelling out loud, he was the only voice you could hear. You know, lovingly, but, "Come on over here. We've got to get this picture." And he posed for all those pictures, remember? When he was in the house, we knew it, man.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did he take you through the White House at all?

**SHEEN:** No, he didn't. I'd gone on tours of it before just as a tourist.

**READER'S DIGEST:** But when was the first time that you actually went to the West Wing and went through and saw the Oval Office?

**SHEEN:** Went through it? As a tourist, I'd seen it in the '60s. I'd been to the White House.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, the public tour, they don't take you into the West Wing.

**SHEEN:** No, I didn't go in there. But I did go in...

**READER'S DIGEST:** I mean, do you remember the first time you saw the Oval Office?

**SHEEN:** He wasn't home. When I went there the first time with Johnson, he left. I went there for a stag luncheon.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Tell me about that a little bit.

**SHEEN:** Well, you get on a list if you're a Democratic supporter, and you get a Christmas card. Remember we used to get Christmas cards all the time from the First Family? And eventually I guess your name ends up on a list. I got invited one day out of the blue in '66, I think it was. And it said Forbes Burnham, who was the first Prime Minister of Guyana, was coming to present his credentials, and would you come? It was a stag luncheon for him. I said, "I'm delighted." So I went down on a train from New York City. I arrived at the gate and they sent me up, and I was standing around at the edge of the putting green. I don't know if it's still there anymore.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Actually, Clinton had it refurbished.

**SHEEN:** He did. Yeah. But it was there and the color was out and the guard and all, and they were receiving this guy, very formal business. And here comes the Old Man. I was astonished at his stride and how big he was. I didn't realize that he was like 6'4". I'll never forget watching him walk along the ground. He was coming across, reviewing the guard, like that. I thought, my God, there's the President, man. He's walking like an old lumberjack. He received this man, and had the guns salute, and then we went in. We got on line. They had to serve drinks and hors d'oeuvres in the East Room, and we were going to go into another room for lunch. And we got on this line to meet him, and Eric Severeid was behind me. We were in alphabetical order. I turned to him at one point — I was so nervous, and I said that I'd never met a President before. What do I call him? And he said, "Well, I just call him the boss."

So I was on the line. I thought, one thing I've always wanted to know about Mr. Johnson was the color of his eyes. I didn't know what color his eyes were. And I thought, I'll find out. I was closer than I am to you. I shook his hand, I looked in his face. I cannot to this day tell you. I think he had brown eyes, but I'm not sure. Were they brown?

**READER'S DIGEST:** I think so.

**SHEEN:** Because his eyes were so hidden, you couldn't see. And his hand was enormous. And I'll never forget — here's what the handshake was like. This was his hand. He didn't squeeze the hand.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Do you think that's because Presidents have to shake so many hands?

**SHEEN:** I'm sure. His hand was all red.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Because Kennedy learned how to do that so his hands would not be bloody when he went through crowds.

**SHEEN:** Yeah. His hands were all red. I looked down at his hand. Because as I put my hand in his, my hand was lost. It was like putting it in a ball mitt. And I thought, My God, I didn't realize how big his hands were.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Others have said he had a large hand.

**SHEEN:** It was like that. And so I looked at his hand, and it was all red. And I thought, Oh, the poor devil. And we went into the room and I'll never forget, I sat next to a guy assigned — you know, you get your plate assignment and it said Ambassador Symington. And I thought, Oh, he's the newest ambassador to Guyana. So this young kid sits down. I said, "Are you the ambassador?" "No, no," he said, "I'm Stuart Symington's son," the Senator's son.

[Man enters.] Hey, how you doing, man? Good to see you. Come on in. Hi, how you doing? Tell me your name again.

**MALE VOICE:** I'm Sean.

**SHEEN:** Sean. My son Ramon [unintelligible]. And you are?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Kimberly.

**SHEEN:** Kimberly, this is Michael. Michael's doing an interview. Sean and Kimberly are interns, is that right?

**MALE VOICE:** Yes.

**SHEEN:** All right. So you just started a few weeks ago.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yes. And this is actually our last week.

**SHEEN:** Last?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Yeah. We're in high school.

**SHEEN:** Oh, my. Well, we're going to miss you. I'm not working — tonight is my only scene this week. So I'm going over to do Charlie's show.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Oh, you are?

**SHEEN:** *Spin City*, yeah.

**FEMALE VOICE:** That's cool.

**SHEEN:** Michael is a historian. He writes about the real Presidents.

Did you happen to hear these tapes on LBJ that came out last year? You might be interested in that. And there's a book also. Well, Michael wrote it and edited the tapes and narrates it. You'll hear his voice on the tapes. Don't the tapes come with the book?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, you have to buy them separately.

**SHEEN:** That's what you talked about on the air. The last thing you talked about, and I wasn't sure whether they did or not. Because the narrator said, the guy who was interviewing you said something about it. Because it was the first I knew there was a book.

**READER'S DIGEST:** [To the interns.] No, I'm a historian. But these are tapes that Johnson made of his private conversations.

**SHEEN:** From the day he became President. I mean November 22. From Air Force One, talking to

Mrs. Rose Kennedy, that conversation. He gets on the phone with the mother of the President. And the communications, how they had to go through that, all the military...

It was breathtaking. And you're straining because all of the noise. It's a lot of noise, static and so forth. And there he is, man. And the one conversation he had, and they played it when you were being interviewed, that I was so impressed with was the one with Mrs. Kennedy a week after the killing. And he talked to her like it was his daughter. He said, "Well, Mrs. Kennedy, you know, you're my hero." A week later: Encouraging the President. And he even said that. "Here you are encouraging me." He was so humble. He adored her. She was on a pedestal.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, yeah.

**SHEEN:** He even complained about it later when they said that he didn't like the Kennedys and all. And he said, "Well, wasn't I there for Mrs. Kennedy?" He always said that, Mrs. Kennedy. He never called her Jackie.

**READER'S DIGEST:** M-I-Z.

**SHEEN:** Yeah, "Miz Kennedy. I was there for her. Well, my God, what was I supposed to do. They said I was in there taking my shoes off in the bed while she's out there. Well, damn it, I did sit down. Who the hell was going to stand up through the whole flight?" They said he had no grace and he had no respect and he was running things like an ogre. He said, "But, damn it, I was running the country. And I love Miz Kennedy. I didn't want to bother her over there. Of course, I took my shoes off."

**READER'S DIGEST:** You do him very well.

**SHEEN:** He was defending his behavior. Oh, he took a beating.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That was for sure.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Is the interview for your new book?

**READER'S DIGEST:** No, this is for *Reader's Digest*. We'll do a three-volume *Age of Sheen* later on.

**SHEEN:** The Bartlet President. Oh, dear, can you imagine? *The Bartlet Years*. Have you seen this

book that's come out?

**FEMALE VOICE:** Which one?

**SHEEN:** On *The West Wing*. Did you get a copy? I ordered some, but Ramon just went over and said they weren't ready yet.

**MALE VOICE:** We saw it. They have them in the office.

**SHEEN:** Oh, did you?

**MALE VOICE:** They're really nice.

**SHEEN:** Yeah. They did a very nice job. They capsule each episode for the first two years, with little blurbs and photographs. A lot of candid photographs.

[To an intern.] So you're off, huh? We're not going to see your smiling face around here again. What school do you go to?

**MALE VOICE:** Kincaid.

**SHEEN:** And where is that?

**MALE VOICE:** Houston.

**SHEEN:** That's right. You came from Houston. And isn't it a coincidence that your mother or aunt is a friend of Tommy Schlamme's, who's from Houston? I thought maybe Tommy was the reason you were here. He's probably the reason you're leaving.

**FEMALE VOICE:** No, no.

**MALE VOICE:** It was great, though.

**FEMALE VOICE:** Well, we were wondering if we could get some pictures.

**SHEEN:** Sure. No extra charge. [Poses for picture.]

**READER'S DIGEST:** I assume that you never met Nixon?

**SHEEN:** I saw him one night when he was ex-Vice President — he was in the middle of his political career. He was a private citizen. I guess he was practicing law over in New York. He was coming out of Sardi's one night and I was playing at a theater next door to Sardi's. I was going to the performance and I had to walk around him. He was outside waiting for a car with some folks. I recognized him right away. But, no, I didn't talk to him. I also saw President Kennedy once in a car.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Where?

**SHEEN:** He had come down in the summer of '63 to lower Manhattan, to Battery Park, to dedicate a memorial down there, that big eagle that sits in Battery Park. He dedicated that in the summer of '63. It's for the sailors who died in the Atlantic, or Coast Guard or some military memorial. And he was arriving just as I got off the subway at South Ferry. We lived in Staten Island. Ramon was born in Staten Island, so I was living there for a couple of years. I was on my way home. They stopped the ferries and all the traffic and the crowds. I was saying, "What the devil's going on?" I pushed my way through the crowd down the bottom, and the car was just making the oval down, to start back up on the other side. And he just leaned forward in a closed limo, and I saw him through the window. He was just like leaning forward. I thought, Oh, my God, it's him. He was so handsome. It was astonishing. He was tanned and he looked so healthy.

**READER'S DIGEST:** It's an interesting question, just given where the plot has been recently on *The West Wing*, Kennedy had Addison's disease, which he did not tell the public about in 1960. And that was something in 1960 that was thought to be fatal, could have been fatal. Kennedy and his people basically did not tell the public the truth about that.

**SHEEN:** Yeah. They let it slide as an injury, part of the injury from World War II. He had an operation, I think, in 1957.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Back operation.

**SHEEN:** The back operation. He was taking cortisone.

**READER'S DIGEST:** That was for the Addison's.



**SHEEN:** It was?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Addison's, until about 1950, was almost always fatal. And they began prescribing cortisone, he had pellets put in his legs, and that was effective. So that when Kennedy was President his face was fat because of the cortisone. But the question occurs, for obvious reasons, should Kennedy have told the public in 1960 that he had this dread disease?

**SHEEN:** Knowing that it could be fatal?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, knowing that the public has a right to know about important Presidential illnesses. I'm asking for an obvious reason.

**SHEEN:** Well, I'm of two minds about it. Today, it's hard to sneak anything by, because you have to go through such a rigorous physical examination, so the whole world knows your state of health. If you have a disease that would not show up in an examination but is not fatal or contagious, and it won't affect your job, I think you're entitled to use your skills rather than be defeated by your body. I think the country is entitled to your skills and your service, because by and large each election is four years. It's going to affect you. The rigors of a campaign alone are far more public than the office. The decisions are made in private. So I think what's going on now is kind of like the public persona of a President. Unless he had heart disease or cancer or something that could take his life during a term, and the disease is not fatal, does not impair his abilities, then you have to hope that whoever the person is, he would continue to serve rather than deny the country that service.

I mean, no one becomes President by accident. Even Vice Presidents are schooled and trained and vetted — he's ready in a moment's notice. But there's nothing that can prepare you for becoming President. There's just nothing. You can study as much history as you want. How much could this guy have studied now to prepare him for September 11? It's not possible. That's fate. You can't know the future. You just have to be as ready as you possibly can on every conceivable level, but you're never ever going to cover all the bases. It's not possible.

**READER'S DIGEST:** What kind of things do you think are more important, life experience...

**SHEEN:** I think the bottom line is character. Once I sat with President Clinton last spring, and he told me to get a paper written by a German that he had read when he decided to run for the Presidency. And he advocated that anyone who wanted to be President should be able to answer all of the questions in this article. It was more of a book than an article. I got it off the Internet from a

friend. Written by a German in 1919, just after the war. It's a famous thing, but I couldn't tell you exactly what it's called. It really delves into Western politics, Western governments and what the servants and the perpetrators of these governments have got to be prepared for, including the United States. And it's pretty extensive. There's nothing you can substitute for personal experience. But personal experience can come through your marriage, your children, your friends.

**READER'S DIGEST:** I agree with you.

**SHEEN:** And they are very often the largest motivating factor. I don't think anyone was more influential on President Johnson than Mrs. Johnson. I probably wouldn't be surprised to learn that he bounced off the most important decisions, including the war in Vietnam...

**READER'S DIGEST:** Oh, I think he did.

**SHEEN:** ...off his family. I promise you, he didn't make that up on the spot when he said he wouldn't run again. Lady Bird knew he was not going to run.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And she actually held his feet to the fire.

**SHEEN:** She did, yeah. I didn't know that, but I assume so, because he was devoted to her.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And she was certain he would die in office.

**SHEEN:** And would he have? He died in '69.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Well, no, he died in '73, of a heart attack two days after the term that he served.

**SHEEN:** Is that right?

**READER'S DIGEST:** So with the pressures of the Presidency, almost certainly he would have died, which she knew. Also Johnson's family, the men did not live beyond the age of 65, which he knew.

**SHEEN:** Is that true?

**READER'S DIGEST:** So he always assumed that he would die at 64, 65.

**SHEEN:** His mother lived to be quite old. He was devoted to his mother. On the tapes he talked about his mother educating him. Very impressive. But I don't know. I'm just speculating. If I had a disease and it was not fatal, but I felt that I had the skills, I would either do one of two things. I would reveal the disease and take my chances, or I would prepare the way that it was coming down. I would have got feelers out there to friends, family, associates, the party, because the party's going to take a whopping too, you know. Would I have done that? I think I would have tried to cover all the bases. It's such a monumental decision, to let health remove you from office.

**READER'S DIGEST:** And in Kennedy's case, especially given the close election, had he revealed it during that campaign...

**SHEEN:** He would have been beaten. And we would have been deprived of an extraordinary man. How did he know about the missile crisis? How do we know how someone else would have handled that? Thank God he was there, and he was so bright and he had an understanding of Europe at the time. And he had experience in Europe and the military. He was a Navy man, and that was the key element of the whole crisis, the Navy.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Did Jackie ever talk to you about...

**SHEEN:** I never met her.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Because you know that she had a part... do you know the story?

**SHEEN:** No.

**READER'S DIGEST:** She had an apartment in New York, a party with Sorensen...

**SHEEN:** To watch "The Cuban Missile Crisis"? This is the first I've heard of this.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Absolutely. I'm surprised that you...

**SHEEN:** I never knew that, yeah. I was always jealous of the players in *Death of a Salesman*. In 1975, I went into New York to replace an actor and finish the run, the last four weeks of George C. Scott in *Death of a Salesman*. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the play. It's one of my favorite plays. And I went in the day after she came to see the play. I missed it. And she came backstage to meet

the players. And I was so jealous that Jackie — and one of the players said that he walked out of his dressing room and he was going down the hall, and he turned and looked and saw this lady just standing there and kept on... he didn't realize, it was Jackie just waiting there like a fan to meet the players. Just standing there. They were over the moon. They couldn't stop talking about it. I was so jealous, because I loved her.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How could you not?

**SHEEN:** There was a biography on this very week. I was watching it Sunday.

**READER'S DIGEST:** When you began playing this President, did you consciously in any way draw on other Presidents you'd seen either on television or in life?

**SHEEN:** There were elements of three guys that were pretty clear from the start. And they've been John Kennedy, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So three that you admired a lot.

**SHEEN:** Yes, a lot.

Somebody once said that had Bobby Kennedy lived, there would have been a socially conscious, compassionate liberal Administration.

It would have been like the Bartlet Administration. I'm so fond of him. I told you, I volunteered for him. I worked for him. Should I tell him the story about you on my shoulders that night? Well, after Mayor Lindsay was elected, there was a movement in New York City for a policemen's review board. I don't know if you've heard about this.

**READER'S DIGEST:** No.

**SHEEN:** He pushed for it. He promised he'd do it in the campaign, and there was a lot of opposition against it, but he pushed for it. And he had Bobby Kennedy come up to New York and campaign for it. We lived at 86<sup>th</sup> Street, between West End and Riverside. It's two blocks from Broadway. And one night I came home and there was a big entourage coming down Broadway headed toward us, and they're announcing, "Come and meet Bobby Kennedy. He's here for the policemen's review board rally." And he was like ten blocks away. So I ran home and I grabbed Ramon and put him on

my shoulders and ran up the street.

**READER'S DIGEST:** How old was Ramon?

**SHEEN:** This would have been in 1967.

**READER'S DIGEST:** So you were...

**SHEEN:** You were three or four years old. It was winter, it was cold. It was a big crowd, and they were moving backward. You know how a crowd moves around press and all that. So we were kind of being jostled around and here comes Bobby Kennedy. He'd kind of broken through the crowd. He'd gone into a store to say hello or something, and he was working his way down the street. He came right up to me, and he reached up and he touched Ramon on top of the head. It was a blessing. It was a thrill. Last year, during the Democratic National Convention, this place was crawling with public figures. We had...

**READER'S DIGEST:** I remember there was a party I was invited to and couldn't come.

**SHEEN:** Yes, Al Gore. Well, they'd been on the set. And Al, Mr. Gore did not come to that one. But Chelsea was here. We thought maybe the First Lady might show up. She wasn't able to make it. There were a lot of visiting Democrats who were here and a lot of people from past Administrations were all coming by. We had a wonderful party on the set. And then that week, during the whole convention, people were coming all the time. And one afternoon two little girls, a little redhead and another little girl, were wandering around the set. And I said, "Hello, how you doing?" "Oh, we're

was so sweet.

**READER'S DIGEST:** It sort of brings it all full circle.

**SHEEN:** Yeah, these kids. I adored him. That family. Ethel Kennedy. We were honored at the memorial fund-raiser last spring over in Washington. We all went over.

**READER'S DIGEST:** She gave you a bust, didn't she?

**SHEEN:** Yes, she did. And I treasure it. It had his image with his famous inscription about "Cast a shadow in the garish night." You know what he said at the convention? That's on the inscription.

**READER'S DIGEST:** "Pay no worship to the garish sun."

**SHEEN:** "Pay no worship to the garish sun."

**READER'S DIGEST:** It was actually Jackie who gave him that quote.

**SHEEN:** Is that right?

**READER'S DIGEST:** Yeah. Because he didn't know Shakespeare in particular.

**SHEEN:** You know, that night, I told you, when I came, he came up on the podium and I met him. I was shaking.

**READER'S DIGEST:** At Madison Square Garden?

**SHEEN:** Yes. He sat on a folding chair right here in front of me. I watched his back and I was like this, and looking at him. He may have moved three or four times. He sat in the folding chair like this. I mean, he was there for like three hours. He didn't speak till seven o'clock. He was just like this, just like this the whole time. Occasionally, he'd applaud. Every now and then, he'd go in his pocket and he'd write something and he'd give this to that one, you know, and he'd go back to this. He barely moved. And his hair was all gray. It was all salt and pepper. He had this shock of hair.

**READER'S DIGEST:** It happened to Bobby because of the assassination.

**SHEEN:** Yeah, it was just like a year later.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Almost overnight.

**SHEEN:** Almost overnight he went gray. He colored his hair when he ran for President.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Is that right? Just because of the way it looked?

**SHEEN:** Yeah, it was red. I color my hair.

**READER'S DIGEST:** But do you know someone who...

**SHEEN:** I don't know who did it.

**READER'S DIGEST:** But you can just see it?

**SHEEN:** Oh, he colored it. Yeah.

**READER'S DIGEST:** Because...

**SHEEN:** It was all gray by then, by the time he ran for President.

**READER'S DIGEST:** He was only 42 years old.

**SHEEN:** And he sat there and sat there. Kenneth Keating spoke, Wagner spoke, Rockefeller spoke. Percy Sutton, who was the borough president from Manhattan, spoke. Borough president of Brooklyn spoke. Couple of Congressmen. I can't remember. Union leaders were speaking by the score. And I thought, How long are they going to embarrass this man? It wasn't until the end that I realized they were holding him. He knew he was going to be the last guy, because he'd clear out the place. And he did. Three hours later, I remember. It was late already. I thought, oh, my God — and they would speak and leave. They didn't sit down. They're all gone. All the big shots. All the big-time politicians. They're all speaking and they hit the road. They held him, and the crowd didn't move. He got up to speak and he said, "Well, I can't really do anything unless I'm in Washington. You want to save the Brooklyn Naval Yard — and I believe in this cause and I will do everything in my power. But I can't do it unless I'm in Washington. So if you trust me with your vote, I'll be delighted to support you." And then he ended with a [familiar] quote: "Some men see things as they are and ask why. I

dream things that never were and ask why not.” The place came down. They were screaming for him after he left. We had to wait on the podium till he left. And he took the crowd with him. It was just phenomenal, his presence. Just his presence, you know. He just... nobody else was in the place.

**READER’S DIGEST:** How much do you think he was conscious of himself practicing politics as theater, knowing the way certain gestures looked and the way that they would affect people?

**SHEEN:** No. I think after the killing, after his brother died, something deeply personal happened to him. He got very, very close to his family. He became a daily communicant, deeply spiritual, a very devout Catholic.

**READER’S DIGEST:** And also very interested in the Greeks.

**SHEEN:** Yes, he did. He started reading Greek philosophy, Greek poetry, Greek drama. He started quoting it. You know what Frank Mankowitz said about him after he died? He said he’d become enamored of the poor. You say that about a guy who’s one step from the nomination. I believe he would have gotten it and I believe he would have beat Nixon like a drum. He would have returned Camelot.