



QUITE BY ACCIDENT

EPISODE 6

“On coming to Brookings, and reflections on today’s politics”

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Episode Summary:

In this sixth and final episode of *Quite By Accident*, Steve Hess shares stories with host Katie Dunn Tenpas about how he came to Brookings, what he did for Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, how he met Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and more. He ends with reflections on today’s politics, the role of luck in a person’s life, and his hopes for the country.

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HESS: Bit player is the one who plays the piano in Casablanca. It's not the main actor, but it's someone on the side. But usually on the side, that's important. And that sort of turned out to be where I was.

The title reflected the fact that there was a quote from John McCain who I really liked, and if John McCain could call himself a bit player, well then certainly I'm a bit player and that's somehow reflected where I was.

And it's really sort of unusual, how seldom I looked for a job. All I really wanted to do was write books and have enough money to write books. And even that happened by accident.

TENPAS: Steve Hess didn't plan to have such a fascinating career at the heart of American politics, power, and intellectual inquiry but, quite by accident, it turned out that way.

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I'm Katie Dunn Tenpas, a visiting fellow and director of the Katzmann Initiative at the Brookings Institution, and a practitioner senior fellow at the University of Virginia's Miller Center.

From his childhood in New York City, to the Army in Germany, to his service with Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon, his friendship with Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others, Steve has been living an amazing life. And whether it was by accident, or as a bit player, doesn't take anything away from his important contributions to our *civic* life.

In this final episode of *Quite By Accident*, he'll share some of his stories after he left the Nixon White House in 1972, which begin with a longtime dream to join the Brookings Institution as a scholar, but you'll also see him once again advising U.S. presidents in a different capacity.

So, how did Steve come to be a senior fellow at Brookings? It was 1972, he had run the White House Conferences on Youth and Children, and had been put forward to head the National Endowment for the Humanities, which didn't pan out.

HESS: So, I go back to the president at that point and I've sort of run out of things I want to do.

In the meantime, the Brookings Institution president has come to me and asked if I would like to join Brookings. Oh, what a marvelous offer! This is really what I really wanted all my life. And how could I get that with all those people have Ph.Ds. and so forth and so on. But by now, I'm sort of a celebrity. And Kermit Gordon—

TENPAS: —Kermit Gordon, Brookings Institution president from 1967 to 1976—

HESS: —Kermit Gordon says, Yeah, we'd love to have you. You can either be my vice president or a senior fellow. Well, I didn't come there to be a vice president of

anything. I said, Oh, sure, I'd love to be a senior fellow. So, I've been there for 50 years. It's been wonderful.

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TENPAS: In 1974, Gerald Ford became president when Richard Nixon resigned. Steve first met Ford in the '60s, when he was a congressman from Michigan.

HESS: Oh, I had written some speeches for him when he was made the Republican leader of the House.

TENPAS: So, January 1965.

HESS: And it was really strange because I didn't know him at that time, but he was gonna give a big speech at the National Press Club, and I was called in to write it.

So, I quickly had to look up to see who the blazes this guy, his background. And I found out that he had been a big football star at Michigan. And I needed a joke to start the thing. So, I had to say, for him, he says, "Imagine where I would be today if I had accepted Curly Lambeau's offer to play for the Green Bay Packers."

And then I instruct him: pause and say, "perhaps on the Supreme Court."

Now there's something that most people here don't remember, but the president of the United States, John Kennedy, had been just appointed a Supreme Court Justice, Whizzer White who had been a great football player for Colorado.

TENPAS: That would be Byron White, a star halfback at the University of Colorado where he got the nickname Whizzer, and led the NFL in rushing yards in 1938. President Kennedy appointed him to the Supreme Court 1962, where he served until his retirement in 1993.

HESS: So, the connection, Where would I be? Pause ... perhaps on the Supreme Court. Everybody in that audience at the National Press Club knew what I was talking about.

[music]

Jerry Ford, I think I heard, liked my jokes more than he liked my speeches, but I wrote some speeches for him so I knew him.

TENPAS: And so, in the mid-'70s, while Steve was at Brookings, President Ford offered Steve two short-term jobs: first, as U.S. representative to UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—think world heritage sites and its other activities to promote peace and security. And second, delegate to the UN General Assembly, where Steve delivered a speech.

HESS: I really liked Ford. I have special feeling for a president who got there without running for it. Harry Truman, Jerry Ford. There was a decency that somehow I felt they lose, these guys who go through the whole process of running around the United States looking for votes. And they'd stayed simple and nice, I thought.

So, at any rate, he sends me to UNESCO in Paris, which is certainly nice being in Paris. I learned something there. I learned never tell a joke in a situation where it's being multi-translated. It really loses it by the time you get to the audience and nobody is laughing.

I also learned that it was a rotten operation at that time, that the head of it was, if not corrupt, certainly inefficient. And the U.S. at that point then decided it would pull its money out. And I was totally in favor of that. We had to put the screws on them to get back in shape, which we did. So, that was basically my experience with UNESCO.

TENPAS: The U.S. formally pulled out of UNESCO under President Reagan in 1984, rejoined in 2003 under President George W. Bush, pulled out *again* in 2018 under President Trump, and rejoined under President Biden in the summer of 2023.

HESS: But then in '76, the election year, when he sent me to New York, to the General Assembly, that turned out to be its own type of disappointment. The ambassador was Scranton, former governor of Pennsylvania, such a nice man. And he promised me that, Oh! I'm so delighted you're going to be here, you know, and we're going to do great things.

What the U.S. had, which virtually no other nation had, was they sent people who were not diplomats to to a General Assembly, and that would be a congressman—a member of the House of Representatives in odd numbered years, because they were always running in even number of years, or a senator in even numbered years. So, the senator they set with me was Howard Baker. Howard Baker said to me, just like your mother saying go out and let me know when you've got a job because we had so little to do.

But at any rate, I took it seriously. I made recommendations. We had a situation where the Saudi Arabian ambassador had a very interesting proposal on using taxes on weapons to pay for the U.N. I thought that was a nice idea. Maybe it wouldn't work, but let's throw it out. They wouldn't let me support that.

TENPAS: Do you know why?

HESS: The State Department ... We have a policy, and you're telling us something that's not our policy. Another time, they were really rough on blocking Israel from something that they had every right to. And I said, let's walk out on this hearing. Oh, no. Anyway, I was not in sync with the State Department.

Then everybody of the group of outsiders gets one major speech to give.

TENPAS: In front of the UN?

HESS: Yeah. And that's sort of exciting. You're standing up there where you've always seen people standing up there and so forth and you're giving a speech and it's very exciting.

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The problem was the speech they gave me was U.S. policy on apartheid in South Africa.

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And I got this speech and I didn't like it at all. And I started to rewrite the speech and they wouldn't take that at all. And then it went on and on because why is the U.S. talking? Well, we don't know why the U.S. is talking, because they were talking because they wouldn't accept what I was giving.

And they finally said, oh, no, no. Henry Kissinger has already approved this and so forth. And I figured, well, I've got to give the speech. I represent the United States, not myself. Moreover, this is a presidential election year. I can't be standing up there and saying, you know, Jerry Ford, thinks something otherwise.

So, I get up and I give the speech. And then I do something that I had no right in the world to do. I said, Well, I'd like to say a few words of my own. They were modest words, but they were—

TENPAS: No hook came out and pulled you off the stage?

HESS: Nobody in the world noticed! The press didn't notice, the U.S. delegations didn't notice, the State Department didn't notice. I was talking at the world and saying some things about how what the U.S. should think about apartheid.

TENPAS: Did it get transcribed in the formal remarks that you eventually got a copy of?

HESS: I never went and looked. I don't know. I guess it did.

TENPAS: Did you dodge a bullet, do you think? Like, would you have been reprimanded?

HESS: Nah, nobody ever talked to me about it again. It was just one of the stupid things I did in my life. So, ...

TENPAS: Probably reflected all the frustration you had with those drafts, right?

HESS: Oh, yeah, that's right. I mean, he gave me a speech to give on apartheid of all things, and I wasn't happy with it

TENPAS: And you disagreed with it.

HESS: Well, yeah, and my changes, it wasn't as if I was turning U.S. policy around, I couldn't do that, but I couldn't make it otherwise. And then I couldn't get away with it.

TENPAS: One of the biggest controversies of the Nixon resignation and ascension of Ford to the presidency was Ford's pardon of Nixon.

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Whether Ford should have done so is a question that still resonates today. I asked Steve if he agreed with the pardon.

HESS: I was one of the few people who went on television saying, I thought it right. This man has just had the biggest punishment anybody could have. He's just lost the presidency of the United States. That's fine with me. That's punishment enough so I felt strongly about that.

TENPAS: So, 1976, the presidential election pitted Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter against now-incumbent President Gerald Ford—who you will recall came to be president because after Spiro Agnew resigned, Nixon picked Ford from the House of Representatives to be his vice president, and then Nixon resigned, elevating Ford to the Oval Office.

It was a pretty close election, Carter with just over 50% of the vote and 297 Electoral College votes to Ford with 48% and 240 Electoral votes. The Nixon resignation scandal was certainly a weight on the Republican ticket.

And once again, Steve Hess was in the middle of national politics.

HESS: And I'm at the U.N. And what happens there is I'm sitting at the U.N., and he's lost.

TENPAS: Gerald Ford has lost to Jimmy Carter.

HESS: And I'm still sitting at the U.N. and the secretary comes to my office and says, Governor Carter's on the line. I look up and say, Governor Carter? I don't think I know a Governor Carter. And a lightbulb. I said, You mean *that* Governor Carter? And she nods. And that was a moment when Jimmy Carter was still carrying his own suitcase, and making his own calls.

And he calls me, and he had read my book on organizing the presidency. And he wants me to go to the White House and figure out what's going wrong. And so—

TENPAS: And what time of year is this?

HESS: This is right after the elections.

TENPAS: So, it's the transition?

HESS: Yeah, the day after the election. And so, the chief of staff at the White House, Dick Cheney. So, I call and say, Governor Carter has just spoken to me. And so, I'm getting on a plane and I'll see you tomorrow morning.

TENPAS: And so basically, you wanted to get the download from Dick Cheney about how they ran the White House?

HESS: Exactly. So, I flew to New York the next day, met with Dick Cheney. And this is the way the world worked before Donald Trump wouldn't even let anybody in. Dick Cheney, his man had just lost the election. But he sat all morning telling me things that had to be fixed, had to be changed. And I listened, and I took notes, and I sent

them right to Carter. And I said, well, according to Dick Cheney, you could get rid of 77 people here and there and so forth.

But it was interesting because the people that came in, with one exception from Georgia, had never been even in the White House. I can remember one saying, I've just been appointed Cabinet secretary. And I said, Well, come over tomorrow—

TENPAS: —come over to Brookings, where Steve was a senior fellow—

HESS: —it's Saturday. I got a room with a blackboard. I drew a rectangle. I said, okay, this is the Cabinet Room: X, that's where the president sits. X, that's where the vice president sits. He didn't know any of that. So, that's what it was like. He was a very nice man. He ultimately did very well. But so, I was in a position to help them for a while at least.

TENPAS: Right. So, Jimmy Carter, interestingly, he sought your advice. He read your book about organizing the presidency, but he refused to appoint a chief of staff and create that position at the beginning of his presidency.

HESS: Yeah, that's right.

TENPAS: Did you try to correct him on that one?

HESS: No, no. No, no, no. He was president of the United States, I wasn't correcting him about things like that. I was responding to the questions that he had. Should the international trade representative be a separate organization or should it be in the Treasury Department or something like that? And I would say, oh, leave it where it is. It's working pretty well. That was the sort of thing we were talking about.

And another strange thing happened. Pat Moynihan had just been elected United States Senator. So, unbeknownst to Dick Cheney, Carter is calling me, and Pat Moynihan writes him a letter. And says, I think you should hire Steve Hess. And this is perfect for me because I don't want to be hired, but I have an excuse now to say I'm sorry, I'm not available.

So, Carter acknowledges the letter, oh, Steve Hess is doing great things, when it comes around to hiring people I'll certainly talk about Steve Hess. And I write him a letter and say, I'm sorry, I'm really not interested going back to the government. Although it wasn't quite fair, I stayed as a consultant for a short time, a month or two on the reorganization of the White House. So, I did get a little paycheck.

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TENPAS: Steve just kept intersecting with famous people. In 1977, he chaired a panel for a conference at Harvard in honor of the Kennedy Fellows program—he had been a fellow a decade earlier. And at the conference, Steve had a delightful encounter with the former First Lady, Jaqueline Kennedy Onassis.

HESS: It was a program that had been set up in honor of John Kennedy. And there were about five of us who were Kennedy Fellows. And on the 10th anniversary of that program, they were going to have a big deal at Harvard. It was going to be something where on a Saturday morning, there were going to be panels. And then

we would have lunch, and a picnic, and then at night there would be a big dinner and dance.

And Jonathan Moore, who ran the program, had asked if I would chair one of those panels. I said, Sure. And the panel was on political parties. And when I got to Harvard Friday night, and he gave me the list of my participants. And when I get to the bottom of the list, it's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. And I gasped. I called him immediately. I say, what's this? What are you doing to me?

And he says that on the senior advisory committee, which she is on, we put one member from that committee on each of these panels and we have given her to you. I have no recourse. That's it.

So, the next morning, of course, it's jammed in our ... I guess I don't know who went to any of the other panels because it was announced that Jacqueline Kennedy was going to be on my panel. And she's not there. So, I start the discussion.

TENPAS: She's a no show?

HESS: So, she's a no show. And I start the program, 10:00, it's 10 to 12. And I give each person on the panel a chance to state what their position is, hoping that they'll give a long statement and it'll go on and on. And they do. So, after about 20, 25 minutes, she shows up, and I greet her and I put her in the one empty seat at the end. Remember, she is an editor at Doubleday.

And so I said to her, You haven't heard the other speakers, so it would be unfair to ask you to give an introductory remark, not having heard the others. And she nods, that's right. So, the discussion goes on. She says not a word. And it's now just about 12:00. So, I turn to Mrs. Onassis, and I say, Well, now you've heard the discussion, you're a well-known editor, would you give us a contract?

[music]

And she says, "Yes" in that dainty little voice she has. She says, "Yes." And the audience goes crazy. Yes, yes, yes. And the session is over and everybody leaves. So, we got away with her saying one word, "Yes," which I don't know what she would have said.

TENPAS: Steve also contributed his experience to Hollywood. Remember the movie *Nixon*, directed by Oliver Stone, starring Anthony Hopkins? It came out in 1995, and although it didn't do well at the box office, it garnered four Oscar nominations. Turns out, Steve had a part to play in it because of his relationship with Richard Nixon.

HESS: Oh, that was strange, because it turns out Oliver Stone directed a movie about Nixon after having a very famous one that he did about Kennedy's assassination. And it happens that my daughter-in-law, whose name is Heidi Levitt, is a very well-known casting director, producer as well. And she was going to cast the movie, the Oliver Stone movie. She did a lot of Oliver Stone movies. And we were in Los Angeles to see my grandchildren, and she said, would I meet with Oliver Stone? Sure, why not?

So, I went over to his office in Santa Monica, and we discussed the situation further. I don't remember much about it at that meeting. He didn't seem to be interested enough. But as I'm leaving, I turned to him and I said, Did you know that Nixon was in Dallas? And his eyes lit up and he said, Was he on the knoll?

TENPAS: The grassy knoll?

HESS: The grassy knoll. Yeah. He also said, could we talk again sometime? And I said, Oh, sure, call me when you're in Washington sort of thing.

So, sure enough, he calls at some point. And I said, okay, I'll get one of our rooms at Brookings and have a session with you.

TENPAS: So, Oliver Stone comes to Brookings?

HESS: Oliver Stone comes to Brookings.

HESS: I make it clear with him that this is a private thing and he agrees. Oh, it's private. Of course it's private. I got a private dining room. And I bring with me Len Garment, who had been his law partner in New York—

TENPAS: —Nixon's law partner—

HESS: —John Sears, who was one of his political advisers, Ron Ziegler, who was his press secretary. He has Anthony Hopkins, he has James Woods, who is going to play Haldeman, and he has his researcher, Eric Hamburg. And so he's got four. I've got four.

So, there we were all together. And it's a crazy lunch. Hopkins is sitting next to me and he has told me to call him Tony.

TENPAS: Anthony Hopkins says, "Call me Tony"?

[music]

HESS: "Call me Tony." So, I say, Tony, note that here are four people who all were close to Nixon, and each one is describing a different person. So, you're going to wonder which one you choose. But that's where we are.

TENPAS: What do you what do you ascribe that to? Was it just that Nixon ...

HESS: Well, we were. That's how much was Nixon and that's how people responded. And all these people had different relations to him.

TENPAS: And he was sort of a different person with each of them?

HESS: Well, you know, John Sears, who was in the meeting, was very anti-Nixon at that point and made that very clear.

HESS: The one who told the best story, strangely, was Ron Ziegler. I say that because he's the only one who never wrote his memoirs. He was writing them, but

he died before it. So, we never know what he really would have said. But everybody was telling their Nixon stories.

TENPAS: But they painted four different images of Nixon?

HESS: Oh yeah. And then Oliver Stone did something that was nice. I said, would you go upstairs and meet with the people who are the assistants and the secretaries and the young people and so forth and talk with them?

HESS: So, he and Tony—

TENPAS: —Tony, your new friend.

HESS: They went upstairs. And we talked about no politics, strictly about movies. And they were wonderful. And we had a wonderful time. And of course, having told them this is all a big secret. The minute we got down, the paparazzi were all over the place.

TENPAS: As we wrapped up our conversations in Steve's office, I wanted to probe just a little bit on his views about politics today. Steve is a lifelong Republican, so I was curious about his views about the state of the modern GOP and its current leader, Donald J. Trump.

HESS: Oh, I don't want to talk about that, it's too grim. It really is. I would say this much. I have not changed my registration. It didn't seem to be any reason for it anyway. I lived and registered, always have, from Washington, D.C., where being a Republican wasn't going to give me any special vote anyway.

Sometimes I voted for Republican. Usually I didn't. I can remember when Obama was running in the primary, and I had read his book and I loved it. And when I went to the polls, I was going to vote for Obama. Of course, I was Republican. Well, it turned out that the Democratic ballot, there was a place for write in, but in the Republican ballot, there was no place. And I wasn't going to leave that polling place until I had an opportunity to put in my vote for Obama. And of course, that stopped everybody, they didn't know what to do. And finally, one of the polling watch came over to me and said, all right, took my ballot and threw it in the box and said, "you voted." And I left.

But there were times when I didn't want to be a Republican, but it was better to stay that way. When Trump ran the first time, before the primary, I did write one article. And I said, This isn't the man that you would want as president. He has done nothing to do that. And I don't know, it was *USA Today* or something. So, I made my position.

Then when he ran, when he got the nomination and ran for president, I did another article. This was in *Newsweek*, and it said, This man is not a Republican. So, I made my case against him.

And then he gets nominated and yes, elected. And then there's the inaugural. And always somewhere given a commentary on the inaugural event, I was always in some studio standing up commentating. This was my favorite speech. This was the

speech when a candidate becomes the president and he puts aside the candidate and he says something for all of the people.

And I'm sitting there waiting for this from Donald Trump. And he gives the speech, this incredible speech in which he's learned nothing. Another campaign speech. America First, America First!

And I said, Well, I don't think I'll ever say anything more, because anything I say that some reporter will pick it up and said, Stephen Hess said something, Donald Trump, blah, blah. And then another reporter will say, I see that you said something and then another, and I would have spent the rest of my days, old days, commenting on this. I said, there are plenty of people who will say these awful things that I feel about Donald Trump, but it's not going to be me.

So, at that point, although commenting on television, which was a fairly big part of my job at Brookings, I just stopped.

[music]

At that point I said to myself, I'm out of this. I have other things to do. Turn it over to other people. Maybe that's an escape, but that's it. If I had answered that first question that came in on his speech, I know that some other reporter would pick up on that and ask me another question. And before I know it, I would be consumed by my reaction to Donald Trump. Let my colleagues at Brookings, let the next generation take this on and deal with it. Their minds are fresh. They care just as much about their country as I do.

TENPAS: But do you have any like hopes that things will change or ... ?

HESS: Things will always change. When you start with history, you know that there have always been bad periods. You don't know how long they'll be, how long it'll take to get through Donald Trump. It's taking us much longer than I expected. But there'll be always people who'll be fighting for that, whether they fight within the Republican party, fight within a third party, or fight with the Republican party.

You know, what can I say that the Republican party is lying dead like dodo right now, that they're not responding to this man. But don't have to say that. That'll be said by plenty of people.

TENPAS: You have this rich relationship with a Democrat named Daniel Patrick Moynihan. If you fast forwarded to 2023, could you see yourself having a close relationship with a Republican or a Democrat?

HESS: Not necessarily me, but otherwise it'd be hard to do it. In other words, the world that I lived in back then in Washington, of course you traveled across party lines. Of course you would have other people, friends of yours, to dinner.

I can remember once we were at a dinner party, and Bobby Kennedy's aide was there at the same party and so forth and so on. And he fell asleep cause the Kennedys worked so hard all night. And we just let him sit there and we went off into the next room and so forth. But he was there.

And another time I was at a cocktail party. I got a call and it's Ted Kennedy's speechwriter. And he needs a joke. Okay, quick, give me a joke. Oh, okay. You want a joke? Here's a joke. So, it wasn't like it is now. Talk to a Ted Kennedy person? Talk to a Bobby Kennedy? It wasn't like that. We, we all crossed party lines and so forth.

TENPAS: There was kind of a mutual respect?

HESS: Oh, I don't know if respect, but we were friends.

TENPAS: Frienemies?

HESS: Yeah. Right.

[music]

HESS: And the truth of the matter is I led my life which is gonna be different than everybody else's life. I think back and I was incredibly fortunate and lucky. I hope everybody has that as well.

But, I'm not saying, "Young woman go out and work hard," that sort of thing. Everybody will adjust their lives to what their prospects are and what their talents are and I wish them well.

I mean, I, I've been so lucky for a number of reasons. I was lucky because of my parents. Everybody is not gonna have parents who cared about them the way my parents cared about me. I was unlucky that my father died when I was 13. But these things happen. You're lucky, you're unlucky.

I don't know if I was lucky or unlucky when I was drafted into the army. A lot of people of my age worked very hard not to be drafted into the army and to be in reserve operations, to get married, to have children and so forth. I went into the army, it seemed logical thing to do, and I thought my two years was useful.

How is it useful? Well, I met people that I wouldn't otherwise meet before. If the man on one side of me had been a coal miner and on the other side of me was a barber, I didn't know those people before.

And more than that, those people had skills that were very needed in the army and I didn't. And they taught me where they suddenly said, Hey, we've gotta fix this deuce-and-a-half. What's a deuce-and-a-half? It's a truck and so forth. So, I learned a lot in that way from them that I could not have learned in any other way, that I would've been dropped in this way. They were good people, I liked them a lot. I got along with them.

And then by the way, when my children came of age, where they had to sign up or not for the draft, I wrote a piece that actually, I think it was picked up more places than any other piece I ever wrote, in which I said, My children, I got a lot out of this experience. You'll get a lot out of this experience. Up to you what you choose to do, but I want to tell you how it worked for me. I should say by the way that they both signed up. Neither got drafted, but both signed up.

Again, when I got out of the Army, and I'm unemployed, and I'm 25, I could have had any sort of job. I didn't know what the next job would be. I mean, the coincidence, the luck, if you will, that it's my former professor who at the very same time is hired to be Eisenhower's speechwriter. So, one month after I'm in the army, I'm writing speeches for Eisenhower. How could I ever have thought that ...I didn't know anything about, I had no pull to get into the White House.

[music]

I had no knowledge of these people. Obviously, my professor thought I was pretty good for what I was doing and wanted me with him.

I have great hopes for this country. And the answer is very simple. I am an optimist. I generally always, when given a choice, think that things are gonna work out and go well, and I've been so lucky that way.

TENPAS: Talk about luck!? / feel lucky to have met Steve, to have been mentored by him, and to call him a friend and colleague to this day.

Over the course of more than 60 years in his professional life in and around American politics and governance, Steve has worked with notable people and contributed important ideas to our understanding of politics and government. He describes himself as a “bit player” and reflects that it all happened “quite by accident.”

But wasn't it Seneca who said that luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity? My high school Latin days were a long time ago, but let's go with Seneca.

And if that's luck, how to explain him working on two White House staffs and advising other presidents; writing more than 15 books on American politics, history, and journalism; and doing important research and analysis as a senior fellow at Brookings for over 50 years—among other accomplishments?

Yes, in many ways Steve has been lucky, but it also seems as if fate and skill aligned to make a life where one triumph built off of the next.

Maybe it wasn't quite by accident after all.

[music]

Thank you for listening to *Quite By Accident*, a podcast from the Brookings Podcast Network. I'm Katie Dunn Tenpas at Brookings and the University of Virginia.

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