

Kirk LeMoyne Billings Oral History Interview – JFK#4, 06/30/64
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Billings was a Kennedy family friend and associate. In this interview, he discusses John F. Kennedy's [JFK] 1946 congressional campaign, personal memories of JFK, and his health, among other issues.

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Kirk LeMoyne Billings – JFK #4

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Oral History Interview

with

K. LEMOYNE BILLINGS

June 30, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Walter D. Sohier

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SOHIER: I wonder, Lem, is we could just pick up some pieces from the previous interviews that perhaps haven't been discussed in enough detail. One thing, I think, you'd mentioned to me was the fact that, in the summer of 1939, Jack Kennedy had run into General [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. I wonder whether you recall what he said about that particular encounter?

BILLINGS: I don't know why you picked that date.

SOHIER: I think it was the summer he went over with his brother Joe, when his father was Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

BILLINGS: Well, I'm not sure, Walter, but I think it was later when he was a Congressman, before General

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Eisenhower ran for President. I'm sure the meeting took place in Germany, so it must have been after the war.

SOHIER: It clearly was not in 1939 that he was in Germany

BILLINGS: I remember now. He was over there on a tour of some kind and he met Eisenhower in Germany. I don't know what the circumstances were but I do remember very clearly his impressions of the General. He, like everybody else, was terribly interested in knowing what the man was like, not only because of his background as a great General but also because he was coming forward as a possible Presidential candidate. Jack told me that Eisenhower was, surprisingly, a kind of a naive type of person and that he was very jolly. He said Eisenhower made a big effort with everyone; and that he was primarily

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interested in telling little stories about sports. He seemed to be a man's man. What surprised Jack was that intellectually he was most unimpressive. He thought the General seemed interested in primarily being sort of a good fellow; "how's the fishing," type; rather immature for a great General. I remember Jack told a story, in which he described and mimicked Eisenhower. It was a fish story. He said Eisenhower was so excited about catching a trout and he explained, with much animation and in great detail, each time the trout touched the bait. He described all this with the greatest relish and pleasure. Jack got the feeling that he was basically more interested in talking about this sort of thing than the problems facing our nation. That was my first impression of Eisenhower, because I'd never known anybody who had met him. I never

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I never forgot this description of Eisenhower, and I thought about it every time I saw him. Frankly, I don't think the President's impression of Eisenhower ever changed.

SOHIER: I was wondering whether we ought to pursue the discussion a little bit. I remember one story that I heard and I think it was from Joe [Joseph W.] Alsop, when President Eisenhower was showing President Kennedy around the White House, and a helicopter almost immediately appeared over the building. Do you remember that story?

BILLINGS: I remember it very well. It was the only time that Jack was in Eisenhower's office as President-elect and it is rather an incredible story. Eisenhower said, "I'd like to show you something that goes with the office of the president." He pushed a button on his desk to demonstrate how fast he could bring helicopters

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to the White House.

SOHIER: You mean to evacuate him?

BILLINGS: I suppose to help him escape in an emergency — whatever the reason, he wanted to show how fast they were available. However, interestingly enough, this had all obviously been planned ahead to impress the new President.

SOHIER: It was sort of a plaything with Eisenhower?

BILLINGS: President Eisenhower should have said, “The helicopters are close at hand and will arrive immediately when I push this button.” After President Kennedy took office he found out how long it really took for the helicopters to come from their base.

SOHIER: I always thought it was to demonstrate

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how quickly the president could get away from the White House.

BILLINGS: This is the impression President Eisenhower wanted to give, but it was rather interesting to President Kennedy that Eisenhower would try to impress him that the helicopters could get there faster than they actually could.

SOHIER: Are there any other little stories which you can recall about President Eisenhower?

BILLINGS: Probably it’s unfair to talk about the things we heard about Eisenhower after President Kennedy moved into the White House. Of course, the White House staff was the same for both administrations. For one thing we found it awfully interesting that much of the

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President’s office was absolutely eaten up with the cleat marks of golf shoes. You’ve never seen anything like the condition of the floor near the terrace doors. Of course, we’d always heard that Eisenhower played a lot of golf. The evidence is there on the floor.

SOHIER: This is down where?

BILLINGS: In his office. There was hardly any floor left from the rug to the door, going out onto the terrace.

SOHIER: From what you saw, what kind of a relationship did President Kennedy have with President Eisenhower?

BILLINGS: The President didn't talk too much about his relationship with Eisenhower, but, I must say, President Kennedy did everything he could to keep it a good relationship because he felt it was most important to have

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Bipartisan support of his foreign policies and even some of his domestic affairs. Historically it's known that whenever he had an important decision to make, that he would not only call President Eisenhower and discuss it with him, but, of course, also President [Harry S] Truman and President [Herbert] Hoover. President Kennedy always did this the entire time he was in office — whenever he had a really important foreign decision to make, he talked to the former presidents and Eisenhower was probably the first one he called.

SOHIER: I had the feeling during the Inauguration that President Eisenhower got to be rather friendly with President Kennedy. He seemed to have sort of a smile of admiration and praise? Are there any stories in that of any particular interest? Or are there any

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further stories about their relationship?

BILLINGS: I'm sorry to say there aren't as far as I know. I feel that Eisenhower was too shallow to really appreciate Jack Kenney. He probably resented so young a man replacing him.

SOHIER: Let's move on to another subject — a quite different one which I don't think we have covered. I think you mentioned to me that Jack Kennedy got involved in flying in some way. Do you remember that at all? Is this just a vague recollection?

BILLINGS: I know he was always interested in flying. I remember, when we were kids, and we saw those small, little meadows where flights were advertised for one dollar we always, rather stupidly, paid our dollar and took a flight in one of those terrible little planes

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(remember we're talking about the early thirties when flying was still quite an unusual experience). I'm not quite clear about Jack's own flying career. I do know, that while he was stationed in Miami on PT boat training during the war, he took flying lessons. It's my impression that he soloed. But it's possible that he didn't. He may have had to leave for the Pacific before he had a chance to solo. He never really flew after that.

SOHIER: Let's move back a little bit in time to Choate School. I think one of the things I meant to ask you before was whether you ever had any reunion at Choate? Did he like reunions? Are there any stories there?

BILLINGS: He didn't like reunions at all — particularly at Choate. I think we discussed before, we left Choate with an unfriendly attitude toward the school,

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for reasons about which we have already talked. After Jack entered Congress, he became one of their more illustrious alumni and was asked every year to come back and make a speech at graduation, etc. He didn't really want to because of his negative feeling about Choate. But, I remember, he agreed to go back if I went with him. I agreed to go if he'd put some of the teachers in their place — those teachers whom we felt had behaved very badly towards us. I thought this would be rather fun. So he agreed, and we went back and he was the major speaker. I remember the speech he made. It was an excellent one. It was a subject in which he was always interested and one which he felt very strongly about. He said that, since the privilege of going to a [preparatory] prep school was extended to so few that those boys had a great responsibility

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towards society. Among these was the responsibility of taking part in the government. He said that, historically, the private school system in the United States, unlike Great Britain, had not encouraged boys to go into public life. He gave a most impressive speech on the subject.

SOHIER: Was this talk something that he thought about a lot in advance?

BILLINGS: He had given it a great deal of thought. If I can just go on a little further on the same subject.... I remember a similar speech about four months before the President died, at the request of the school, a few of us alumni got together and commissioned his portrait as a gift to the school. The President wasn't able to attend the Presentation Exercises which took place at the same time as Alumni Day. However,

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he taped a message to be used at the presentation. I remember it was the same kind of a speech that he's given so many years before, when he was a young Congressman. He, again, encouraged the graduates of the private school system to take part in government service.

SOHIER: What did he think about private schools? Was he against the concept, do you think? I'm sort of interested in this myself. Did he feel that it would have been better if he and everybody else in a position financially to go to a private school had gone to a public school? Did he have any feelings about this, or was it merely that he felt that if you have the opportunity to go to a private school you ought to then....

BILLINGS: Feel the deep responsibility of the privilege you had been given. When we attended

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Choate public service was not one of the ambitions of the students. To answer your question, I never heard him speak other than very highly of the private school system. I think he felt that it was extremely unfortunate that in some areas the public schools couldn't give the kind of education that private schools could. I think he felt that there was no question that, if a family could afford to send a boy to a private school, they should give their boy this advantage.

SOHIER: And this is the sort of thing that he would have planned for his own children?

BILLINGS: Oh, yes, but I think that, as President, he felt that it was very important that the educational system in the public schools should be greatly improved.

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SOHIER: Now let's shift to quite another subject. You pointed out earlier what a lot of fun Jack Kennedy was and I think perhaps you have some more illustrations of this. This, I think was an awfully strong thing with you, at that time and undoubtedly later in life — that he was just an awful lot of fun to be with. Can you remember some further stories of fun? I think you mentioned one story in which you changed names.

BILLINGS: I think it's hard to remember particular experiences during the many years that I knew him. Unfortunately my recall isn't very good. Jack was more fun than anybody I've ever known and I think most people who knew him felt the same way about him — at least, those people who were lucky enough to know him as well as I did. As I said before, he never lost this ability

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to be tremendously good company. I think I've given a few of the stories I recall. I remember, for instance, he was very successful in his relationship with girls and, I felt, more successful than I was. I told him that the only reason he was successful was because he was Joseph P. Kennedy's son, since his father was pretty well known as a very rich man. I always kept telling him that this was the only reason that he was doing well. One night he insisted that we take out two blind dates, arranged by someone else. I was to be John F. Kennedy and he was LeMoyné Billings. He even went so far as to get his father's Rolls [Royce] for the occasion. We had one very competitive night trying to see who would do better and I'm afraid, as I recall, he was satisfied with the results.

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SOHIER: Were there any other stories?

BILLINGS: I think I remember also we used to do an awful lot of driving and I guess, like a lot of young fellows, he drove pretty fast. We drove a lot around the Cape. You couldn't get arrested too many times for speeding in Massachusetts without having trouble with your license. I think he'd just reached that point. One night, we were riding along in an open car. I remember a cop was coming up behind us — another ticket would have cost Jack his license. While the car was still moving, we changed places, which is a very tough operation to do. If you ever try it, you'll find out how really tough it is. After we'd changed places, we suddenly realized that he had on a white coat and I had on a dark coat. There was much scrambling to get those coats changed. I don't know how

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we did it, but we got away with it and, of course, I got the ticket!

SOHIER: The father in a family I used to know in Boston, was the Governor of the state at one point, and you couldn't be arrested or at least if you were all you had to do was show the name and that was the end of that. Was there that with the Kennedys at this point. I mean was there a lot of that in Massachusetts?

BILLINGS: No, there wasn't any of that in Massachusetts. The father was, I suppose, well known but not that well known, and his grandfather was also rather well known, having been, as he always said, "the greatest mayor Boston ever had." But this never seemed to help Jack with this problem as evidenced by the story I have just told. I do remember a rather funny time,

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though, when we were on the parkway in New York state while he was a Congressman. We had passed a State cop, not really going very fast but State cops, I guess, don't like you to pass them at any speed. This guy drew up beside us and gave Jack hell, he was really very rude. We really hadn't been speeding, but he just was in a mood not to have anybody pass him. Although he was unnecessarily insolent, I remember the President didn't really say anything. While the cop was looking at the different cards and license, he said, "You're not one of the Kennedys of Boston, are you?" And the President said, "I don't know what Kennedys you're talking about, but my family comes from Boston." And he said, "You're not the Congressman, are you?" And Jack Kennedy said, "Yes, I am." And, of course, it was rather interesting to see the change in the officer's manner.

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We enjoyed this, I must say, thinking of the problems we'd had with the law in our youth.

SOHIER: Now I wonder if we could move to the congressional campaign when he ran for congressman in the eleventh Congressional District of Massachusetts. This was in 1946. Were you around when he made his decision to run? It's been written up that his father had a long talk with him one night and after this he said, "I think I'll run for Congress." And also tt he said, and I quote, "If Joe were alive, I wouldn't be doing this." Apparently he made a statement like that to the press. We've covered some of this before, but what are your reactions? What do you know about the beginning of this?

BILLINGS: In the first place, I was late getting out of the Service. I don't think I actually got back from

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the Philippines and was discharged from the Navy until March of 1946. The primary was in June. However, I know a little about it because obviously I had discussed it with him. Of course, it was James M. Curley's congressional seat that became available. As I remember, Mayor Curley decided against re-election rather late. His decision not to run was a rather sudden one. There were about ten competitors for the seat. One of them was the Mayor of Cambridge — all of them were much better known in the district than Jack Kennedy. I don't believe any of this business about the father pushing Jack Kennedy into running, or that he wouldn't have run had it not been for a feeling of family responsibility because Joe wasn't around. I've read and heard all these stories but I never heard Jack say this in his life. Maybe this

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was a good thing to say to the press. I just don't feel, in my own mind, that this was the reason that Jack Kennedy went into politics. In fact, I know it wasn't. I'm sure that Mr. Kennedy was very pleased that Jack made this decision but I'm sure he didn't make it just because his father wanted him to. Whatever the reasons were, and I have the feeling that this was the obvious thing for Jack to do, don't forget also his grandfather was around, who was probably interested in having him run.

SOHIER: This was [John F. Fitzgerald] Honey Fitz?

BILLINGS: Yes. He was very much around in those days, and I'm sure that he was thrilled to have his grandson enter Boston politics.

SOHIER: Was he helpful at this point? Did he participate in this?

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BILLINGS: We're getting ahead of the story. I can tell you exactly the part he played. First of all, I don't know whether we have discussed Jack's relationship with his maternal grandfather.

SOHIER: No, we haven't.

BILLINGS: It was a very wonderful and close relationship. They were absolutely crazy about each other. Jack was undoubtedly the old man's favorite. There's been an awful lot written about Honey Fitz. He was a very attractive old man, full of the Irish blarney, full of mischief, and love of life. So much of Jack's love of life and his inquisitiveness about life and his interest in everything comes from his maternal grandfather. Mayor Fitzgerald never lost his intense enjoyment of life. He was well into his eighties when

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he died. I think he was probably in his very late seventies when Jack ran for Congress. He was so excited about his grandson coming up there and going into politics in his own home area that he was beside himself. He lived in the Hotel Bellevue with his wife, who was a lovely person.

SOHIER: I guess she's still alive.

BILLINGS: She still is. I think perhaps she's a little senile now. I haven't seen her for four or five years, but she was a terribly nice, quiet lady who was able to put up with Honey Fitz for fifty to sixty years. She adored him as he did her. She must have had an exciting life with him. He was a man who was never still for one moment. His humor was something that Jack loved so much; he adored his grandfather's sense of humor. I think one of the reasons that Jack always enjoyed [David] Dave Powers

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was because his Irish sense of humor must have reminded him of his grandfather who had that same wonderful knack of telling stories. It wasn't the fact that the stories were so good, because we heard the same ones over and over again. Certainly Jack had heard them many, many times. But each time the Mayor told a story, he'd tell it in a different way and he'd laugh and enjoy it so much himself that everybody else had to enjoy it and, I must say, nobody enjoyed it more than Jack. He always took every opportunity to ask his grandfather to tell some story that he'd heard at least ten or twelve times. And this is the same kind of knack Dave Powers has — the ability to tell an Irish story and tell it well, and Telling it so the President could listen to the same story many, many times. I think that, unquestionably, his admiration for his

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grandfather and his grandfather's love of politics had some influence on his coming into the congressional fight. Undoubtedly in the long run it was because Jack wanted to do it himself.

SOHIER: Wasn't Mrs. Kenedy's father deeply involved in the campaign?

BILLINGS: Oh, he was very much involved, but probably wanted to be involved more than Jack allowed him to be. He brought out all his old buddies, all sort of

over-the-hill Irishmen, who were living in the past. They wanted to go back to the old kind of politics. In Jack they thought they saw an opportunity to do this. Their eyes were filled with Irish excitement for the new battle. Jack had to discourage his grandfather's desire to run the campaign his way. He enjoyed his grandfather's

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Exuberance and he did let him take part but he had to hold him back.

SOHIER: Now, you're talking about Mr. Kennedy's father?

BILLINGS: Oh, no, Mr. Kennedy's father was not living. Mr. Kennedy's father died before the President was born.

SOHIER: You're talking still about Honey Fitz?

BILLINGS: Honey Fitz, yes.

SOHIER: I was trying to bring out that Mr. Kennedy's father also was involved in politics, wasn't he?

BILLINGS: Well, he was, yes, but that was long before the President was born.

SOHIER: So the Kennedy side of the family, in

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terms of political life in Boston, was not a big factor.

BILLINGS: Well, I think his father was very important not only because he was well known but his family had been important in East Boston.

SOHIER: That's right and in the North End, I think were the Fitzgeralds.

BILLINGS: Well, of course, the Fitzgeralds were all over Boston. Mayor Fitzgerald was known all over Boston because he had been not only the Mayor of Boston but also he had been a United States Congressman. At the end of his political career he ran for the United States Senate against Henry Cabot Lodge, the grandfather of the present Ambassador to Vietnam. Mr. Kennedy's father was well-known in his day. He had been in the State Senate as well as political boss in East Boston.

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Undoubtedly this was helpful to Jack. However, Mayor Fitzgerald was alive, on the scene, and terribly excited about the whole thing. I think you asked me what part Ambassador Kennedy,

Jack's father, played in this congressional primary. At that time and forever more, he was in the background. He was never seen and was never in evidence.

SOHIER: Was this because he felt he was an unpopular figure because he'd made a lot of money?

BILLINGS: No. I think again this is evidence of his ability to determine what was the right thing to do. It was evident in the way Mr. Kennedy behaved all during Jack's political career. He knew perfectly well that a strong personality like himself might mislead the voters into believing that the real power behind Jack Kennedy

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was his father and that Jack Kennedy was just a young man who didn't have a mind of his own. His father wanted to make sure that Jack was never charged with this.

SOHIER: Now you came back from the war and arrived, I guess, while things were well underway?

BILLINGS: When I came back, his decision had been made to run. I was trying to get back into my own life and had applied for admission to Harvard Business School. I was accepted and I was to begin the first part of June. I had a couple of weeks before that, so I decided to go to Boston and see how Jack was getting along. Of course, I was very interested. It was exciting to me to have him running for Congress, which, at the time, seemed a very high office indeed.

SOHIER: You hadn't seen him for a while? Did

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it seems sort of funny? Had your relationship changed? How did it strike you?

BILLINGS: This wasn't the first time I'd seen him since I left the service. I had visited him several times, but before he had actively started campaigning. There was never any change in our relationship?

SOHIER: Had he grown in any way? Had he become suddenly more mature or was he the same guy you'd known before? There wasn't any discernible difference, was there, that you can recall?

BILLINGS: I'm sorry I don't remember any change. I went to Boston and found him deeply involved in this very tough fight with absolutely nobody behind

him except his grandfather and his grandfather's friends, all of whom admittedly had been out of politics for many, many

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years and proved to be more hindrance than help. They all had advice and wanted to direct his campaign. All the old [politicians] "pols" who had been hanging around for years thought this was the opportunity to get in it again.

SOHIER: Oh, he had this kind of problem, did he?

BILLINGS: Oh, boy; oh, boy! Here was a rich young man, the heir to the great Kennedy fortune, a young Ivy Leaguer who had been born in Boston but hadn't lived there for years; a man who had gone to all of the best schools, had come back into this rather poor district from which his forefathers had come but where had never lived himself. They didn't think he had a chance — this young thin man who looked much younger than his twenty-nine years. Many unscrupulous politicians thought this was going to be a good ride and that probably they could

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pick up some money, too.

SOHIER: How would they pick up money?

BILLINGS: Oh, by saying they were going to help to do this and that. By misleading him, they probably felt they could take his money. They probably thought he didn't have any sense. Lots and lots of these Boston "pols" completely misjudged him.

SOHIER: But you settled right into the machinery....

BILLINGS: Well, I didn't intentionally. As I said before, his grandmother and grandfather had an apartment in a rather old-fashioned hotel which happened to be in his district.

SOHIER: That was the Bellevue?

BILLINGS: That was the Bellevue, which was in his congressional district.

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SOHIER: It's on Beacon Street, isn't it?

BILLINGS: Anyway, it's right next door to the State House. The President took two rooms there — a bedroom and a living room, there he was, without anybody. He didn't want his father around. He was concerned about having any of his father's friends help him. He really wanted to do it on his own. I'm sure he discouraged his father from sending people of his generation around. He certainly didn't have any choice about his grandfather's friends. These old people were all over his living room. I remember when I first got there his entire living room was filled with old Irish politicians smoking up a storm.

SOHIER: Did he think this was pretty funny or was he concerned about it?

BILLINGS: He was concerned but he had to feel

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his way and he wasn't going to insult anybody. This doesn't mean he took their advice. He listed and made up his own mind as to what he was going to do. He certainly didn't turn away anybody who wanted to help him, young or old, whoever they were. He talked to them and any help they could give him he was happy to receive. Later he'd decide who he was actually going to depend upon.

Of course, it was so very early in the campaign when I arrived. He hadn't really made decisions as to who were trustworthy and whom he could depend upon. Obviously, there were some very good people who came in as well as many, many bad ones. I remember I was only planning to stay there for a week and just sort of be an observer — go around where he went and listen to him make his talks and generally just enjoy the excited of the

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whole thing. I remember one day he said, "We've opened up a headquarters in Cambridge — it is being organized by a fellow from Cambridge. I don't know much about him. I think it would be helpful if you'd spend some time over there and see what he's doing." Remember Cambridge was the biggest town in his district. I won't go into the whole thing, but at the headquarters I met a lady named Rose Reynolds. She had been working as a volunteer there since the headquarters opened. She was dedicated to Jack Kennedy. She's dead now — but it is dedicated women like Rose who helped Jack become President. She was worried sick about how things were going at the Cambridge headquarters. She told me all sorts of stories about the man who was running things there. I watched, and a lot of what she said was true. I told Jack and he said

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"Why don't you go over until we find somebody to take your place?" So I went over there and I stayed until the end of the [election] primary. I really got deeply involved in the whole thing.

SOHIER: In other words, you stayed over in Cambridge and sort of headed up that part of the campaign?

BILLINGS: Yes, I stayed and went back to the Bellevue every night about three in the morning. I'd come back and there Jack would be with the greatest cross section of people you've ever seen jammed into his living room and bedroom, all smoking cigars and sitting around talking — most of them were no help at all. When we went to bed, even at three or four in the morning, there'd be people sitting and smoking cigars on my bed as well as the candidate's. I don't know when or how he ever got

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any sleep. When we'd wake up in the morning, we'd find people still sitting around the room smoking cigars. He was working hard; he was learning.

SOHIER: He still had a brace on his back didn't he?

BILLINGS: If he did, I don't remember that. It certainly was one of the better periods for his back, because I don't remember back trouble.

SOHIER: And there was malaria; you read that his skin was yellow.

BILLINGS: If he did, that's one problem that....

SOHIER: He had some other problems....

BILLINGS: I don't remember his health problems during the entire congressional campaign. If he had it, he had so many other problems that he didn't talk about it

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and none of us even thought of it. He may have been in pain, like he was so much of the time, but if he was, his mind was on other things and he never discussed it. It never crossed my mind, until this moment, whether he was sick during that period, whether he had a bad back, whether he had malaria, or whether he had this or that or the other thing. He was very thin, as pictures will show, but he certainly was working as close to twenty-four hours a day as a man can work. He never let up during the entire campaign. Many health men could not have kept up that pace.

SOHIER: What was his ability at this point for public speaking?

BILLINGS: I'll tell you about his ability. It was exciting to me to find that he had a natural ability

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to speak well in public. I really hadn't realized this. You see I never really thought about him as a public speaker or as somebody who could influence people by what he

said. (I just never really thought about it, although I'm sure he had always had all these attributes.) It was inspiring to hear him make a speech in front of complete strangers who were usually people who were thinking "here's just a young, rich guy and let's hear what he was to say." It was really one of the great experiences of my relationship with Jack. Through the years, in the advertising business I've had to do a lot of selling. If you have a good product and you are able to expose that product properly, then you can be successful. That's really the whole secret of marketing — in Jack Kennedy, we found we had a good product and a product that, if

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properly exposed, would convert voters to his side. This was so encouraging because, after a very short time, we found that all we had to do was expose him. We thought of every means we could to expose Jack Kennedy properly. I can only speak for my own area, the Cambridge area, where my job was to do whatever I could to expose him to the entire city. One of our more important jobs was to set up what were, and I guess still are, known as house parties. This means that we would furnish folder chairs and coffee, to anyone who would hold open house for their friends and have Jack Kennedy there as a speaker.

SOHIER: They'd furnish the house?

BILLINGS: They'd furnish the house and they'd ask the guests.

SOHIER: Who'd you get? What kind of persons

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would be invited?

BILLINGS: This was just a great chain letter. We had our headquarters in Cambridge. Somebody would come in who was interested in Jack Kennedy. We had many things we could ask them to do; perhaps all they would do would be to take ten bumper stickers — if they'd conscientiously put them on cars, that would be at least some help. Of course, we'd ask them to go the whole route and one of the important things to ask was if they'd give a house party, asking forty or fifty people to join them to meet the candidate at their home. We tried to plan five to six house parties a night, which means that he'd spend fifteen minutes in each home. Somebody would go ahead to keep the people happy until he got there. Obviously, it was impossible to schedule that everybody was happy.

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SOHIER: Who did you get to go with him who would come in and talk first?

BILLINGS: In a short time, (we didn't have much time) the Kennedy personality came across to a lot of the aggressive young fellows in the district. Most of them were young veterans, who, exposed to Jack, felt as most people did about

him. They joined with him. It was just a question of which one would do what and which one he'd choose. In the end, he'd pick the ones who were best qualified to help him. He really never had any problem in having competent people around. Of course, his sister Eunice was a great help — many times she went to the house parties ahead of him.

SOHIER: Who were these people? Are they people that we know now in the government?

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BILLINGS: I suppose some of them are very big in Boston today. I don't know. I can remember some of their names.

SOHIER: Was Mayor Russell the mayor then or was that somewhat later?

BILLINGS: I think [John D.] Hynes was the mayor. I can't be sure. I think his name was Hynes, but I don't remember the mayor. He didn't help us anyway. There was a guy named Mark Dalton who helped awhile. Somehow he fell by the wayside. I don't know what happened to him. There was a guy named John Droney, who was very, very helpful in Cambridge. I don't know what's happened to John Droney and his sister Mary. And there were some people named Mahoney. I think the only one from those very early years who was with Jack the whole

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way until the day he died was Dave Powers.

SOHIER: What was he doing at this time?

BILLINGS: Jack met him in Charlestown (a section of Boston); that's Dave's hometown. Dave didn't have too much education — I don't know if he even finished high school, but he had the same kind of personality that he has today; that great Irish wit. He knew Charlestown backwards and forwards. He is older than we are, I suppose he was four or five years older than the President. He'd been around in a small way in politics in his own backyard. He took a tremendous liking to the President and the President to him. He became very important in Charlestown and, furthermore, after that, he was always with Jack in a very personal way. I don't know that there are any others from those early days.

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SOHIER: The family got involved right away, didn't they? Didn't Bob Kennedy....

BILLINGS: Bob Kennedy was very, very young remember. This was in 1946.

SOHIER: But wasn't he there?

BILLINGS: He was, but remember he was very, very young.

SOHIER: How old was he?

BILLINGS: Probably twenty, and he was just out of the service. He'd gotten in the service late because of his age. He'd been assigned to the USS *Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.* which was a destroyer named after Joe. I remember he had just gotten out of the service in time for the campaign.

SOHIER: Later than you had?

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BILLINGS: Yes, he got out even later. He came in after we had already gotten started and after I actually had been established in the Cambridge headquarters. I remember Bobby showing up and he was still in his sailor suit. He was just a seaman. He wanted to do something and it's funny that Bobby showed his aggressive strong nature even then. Bobby and I were great friends — I'd known him ever since he was a kid. He came and started working with me in Cambridge. He didn't want to work under me in Cambridge. Very shortly he wanted to go out on his own, and there were eleven districts in Cambridge. He took over three. Those were his and he didn't want me to get into them at all. He went down there and that was completely his area. He wasn't married then, but there was a young girl named Ethel Skakel, who was a roommate of his

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sister Jean. Ethel and Jean and Pat Skakel, Ethel's sister, who was also sort of a sweetheart of Bobby's at the time, all were down there helping him in his little headquarters. As I recall, it was the poorest part of Cambridge. I'll never forget it — Bobby wouldn't let me near the place.

SOHIER: What about [Timothy J., Jr.] Ted Reardon?

BILLINGS: Ted Reardon had charge of Somerville. Ted had been one of Joe's best friends, had gone to Harvard with Joe, and was a Boston boy. He came from Somerville. He was very, very fond of Joe and he has always missed Joe dreadfully. Jack put him in charge of Somerville and he did a good job there. As you know, when Jack went to Congress, he took Ted with him and Ted was his administrative assistant for many, many years.

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SOHIER: You read that Jack Kennedy was a more retiring guy than his brother Joe, and so it wasn't as natural for him to get into politics and it took quite a lot

of doing to go out and say “hello” to a lot of truck drivers and so on. How did you assess this, as you saw it?

BILLINGS: Well, maybe it was hard for him to do it. I don't know whether it was hard or not. I think it's hard for anybody to do it, and I think it would have been hard for Joe Kennedy to do it. We can all remember when we had to do whatever job we had to do in the early years, whether we were salesmen or whether we were lawyers. Everything's hard at first. I think it was hard for Jack Kennedy. For instance, one of his first acts was to call on all the city councilmen in

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in Cambridge — obviously they were all friendly to the Mayor. I called on these men with him. They were extremely hostile and really rude to him. They treated him like a young kid who had absolutely no business going into politics. He was wonderful with them and handled them with great tact. He didn't gain their backing, but I was proud of the way he handled himself and how intelligently he talked to them and how small and petty they appeared in comparison. Out of the entire city council in Cambridge, he had only one councilman who was with him. That was Joe DeGulielmo, who was, until the President's death, a strong supporter and a man Jack Kennedy never forgot. Jack Kennedy never forgot people like Joe DeGulielmo, who were his early supporters in the days when it really counted.

SOHIER: You pointed out that this was Mayor Curley's

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old seat and that he decided not to run. Of course, in Boston Mayor Curley was an enormously popular as well as a corrupt figure. What about the corruption problems?

BILLINGS: Let's get ahead of ourselves a little bit here on Curley because I think Curley is an interesting part of...

SOHIER: I'd like to discuss whether he knew Curley.

BILLINGS: I don't know how well he knew Curley. Of course, Curley knew his family intimately and Curley was of the same school and the same vintage as his grandfather Fitzgerald. Perhaps he was a little younger than Mayor Fitzgerald but in the same vintage. They never did get along at all. I don't know if they hated each other but they were constant competitors. Mayor Curley after

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all fashioned himself as sort of Boston's Robin Hood — the man who took care of the poor Irish. I think that the poor Irish felt that he was quite right in doing whatever dishonest things he did.

He wasn't concerned about things that would seem terribly dishonest today. He certainly did things that he couldn't possibly have gotten away with today.

SOHIER: He also was the best public speaker practically anybody ever heard.

BILLINGS: He was one of the truly great public speakers. I don't know why he wasn't around during the campaign; maybe he was in jail. You know he did go to prison for mail fraud; maybe that's why he didn't run for Congress. I can't remember. That can be looked up. Wherever he was, he was not around, to my knowledge, when

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Jack Kennedy was running for his office. Maybe he was sick; I don't know, but I don't ever remember any interference or any help from Mayor Curley. However I do remember, and this is where I'm getting a little ahead of myself, that after Jack Kennedy was elected, probably the most junior Congressman in the whole state, the entire Democratic machine in Boston got together and signed a petition asking President Truman to release old, sick Curley from jail. Every single Democrat in the state, as I recall, again the records will show this, signed this petition from the Governor down to the lowest assemblyman. Jack Kennedy felt that he had been convicted of a dishonest act and he felt that it wasn't morally right to sign a petition for his release, even though this might have meant his political end. Through this he earned the undying enmity

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of Curley, who was still politically powerful. He refused to sign the petition. This was one of the first evidences of Jack's Kennedy's great political courage.

SOHIER: You mentioned why he did this. Was there a lot of discussion in the family? Did he talk to you about this? Is this your surmise? I guess there was some bad blood between the Kennedys and the Curleys in Boston. You've stated why you felt it happened. What do you base that on?

BILLINGS: I base it on the fact that Jack morally couldn't sign the petition.

SOHIER: He talked about this? Did you discuss this?

BILLINGS: Yes we did discuss it and I know that was his reason. He morally couldn't sign it.

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This is typical of his attitude towards right and wrong throughout his whole political career. He just could not vote for things that he thought were morally wrong. He would not vote for bills just to keep himself in office. You know how he voted on the St.

Lawrence Seaway. The Seaway was, of course, highly competitive to the port of Boston. In voting, he just considered the good of the nation instead of his own district. This is, of course, very unusual in politics. For instance, you won't see it today with politicians from the South. I'm sure many of those senators and congressmen from the South don't believe in what they're saying. Jack Kennedy believed in his convictions. Since the St. Lawrence Seaway opened up the entire Midwest, he felt that it was necessary for the good of the nation. He lent his support. This was

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when he was Senator. He was stronger then, of course, than when he refused to sign the Curley petition, but it could have seriously hurt him politically.

SOHIER: I think Senator [Leverett] Saltonstall did the same didn't he?

BILLINGS: I don't know because I wasn't interested in Senator Saltonstall. I know what Jack Kennedy did.

SOHIER: Of course, maybe that's a thing that will be discussed later.

BILLINGS: I know that Jack Kennedy always had a wonderful relationship with Senator Saltonstall, even though they belonged to different parties. I don't think Saltonstall was even aware of him before he got in the Senate, but I know that all during Jack's time in the

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Senate they were great friends and apparently voted alike in many, many cases. I know that, after the President died, Senator Saltonstall told me how much he had respected the President and how fond of him he had been.

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BEGIN SECOND TAPE OF INTERVIEW FOUR

SOHIER: Well, we're now in the middle of 1946, in the primary. I guess the primary was the big thing because, whatever Republican candidates there were, they weren't to be taken very seriously?

BILLINGS: No, only the primary was important. I don't think Jack even had to run for the election. I'm sure there was a candidate, but there was no campaign whatsoever. It was strictly a democratic district. I sort of hate to leave this part of his career because this period, when he first ran for Congress, played such an important part in his development.

SOHIER: What was he thinking at this point in the Bellevue Hotel? What was he looking for?

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BILLINGS: As I told you, Jack had great loyalties and he trusted people. He had some pretty bad shocks about people during those days, and I'm sure he learned a lot from that. For instance, there was a very aggressive young guy, named Peter Flaherty, whom Jack trusted and gave considerable responsibility. He was a bright young Irishman, eager, and seemingly a good man. However, he had one terrible quality — he was completely dishonest. Because there were so many other things for the candidate to think about, it wasn't until the very end of the primary campaign that he found that Flaherty was absolutely stealing him blind — I mean he was forging checks, etc. Funnily enough, Jack Kennedy didn't prosecute him, but just told him he knew what he was doing, didn't press him too much for paying it back, but never had anything to do with him again. This man is

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still in politics in Boston; probably stealing from somebody else. This was a very bad thing, because I think it was one of the first exposures that Jack Kennedy had to somebody in whom he had faith being completely bad.

SOHIER: This must have been an awfully tough thing, because Boston politics at this point in time were hardly clean. Was this the only example of...

BILLINGS: No, but this was a personal one.

SOHIER: Were there things that he had to do that he didn't want to do?

BILLINGS: Oh, I remember there was a terrible labor man there. I can't remember his name, but he was a big, fat, unattractive Italian guy who was constantly trying to make Jack compromise. Again, I was impressed with the way he handled him without ever giving in, he

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even kept him happy. Actually, although Jack had had no previous experience in politics, he learned very fast.

SOHIER: Those of us who don't really understand politics feel that there obviously are compromises that a guy can't make and yet one can't make it to the top without making some. Didn't he ever make compromises?

BILLINGS: Why would he have to make compromises? Remember, he had ten opponents, yet he won without owing anyone anything.

SOHIER: I'm going to get to that.

BILLINGS: I'm sure he spent as much as he could legally spend, for [television] TV and radio, billboards, etc.

SOHIER: He got an early start, too, I think.

BILLINGS: I'm sure that whatever he was legally

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allowed to spend on advertising was spent. It was important because, as I said before, every time he was exposed, whether it was on television or radio and particularly in person, he was getting votes. In this first campaign, he demonstrated his ability to work harder than any other candidate was willing to work. He was tireless — and never stopped for a second.

SOHIER: Do you remember any of the other candidates?

BILLINGS: The only one I remember was the Mayor of Cambridge because obviously, he was the only one I was involved with. He was a regular old “pol,” probably about sixty years of age, but of course, didn't have any of Jack Kennedy's qualities.

SOHIER: He was the only veteran, I think, in the

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group, although this is a matter of record. Were there any people who were anxious to get into the act who were talked out of it? Was there any of that kind of thing?

BILLINGS: Oh, yes. You mean who wanted to be Congressmen?

SOHIER: No, who were in the running but might have been talked out of running.

BILLINGS: Certainly not by Jack. Frankly, the whole thing was amateurish. Jack Kennedy went in there with absolutely no experience and absolutely no people back him. This is incredible but it's true — nobody. He went up to his suite and at first there were only his grandfather's old people. The word got out and people began coming to him. He had absolutely no one — no machine of any kind. Whatever organization his

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grandfather tried to assemble was so old and old-fashioned in their ways that they were detriments rather than help. He came across because he was bright, he spoke well, and he was sincere. And I don't think he probably ever felt that he had to make any compromises? Why should he?

SOHIER: Were the house parties like the tea parties that followed later in the senatorial campaign with Mrs. Kennedy and the sisters in attendance or were these a lot simpler than that?

BILLINGS: These were very simple, because actually it was just nice people who would open up their homes in middle-class areas or in poor areas. They would ask in friends who might be interested in the candidate. Just coffee and cookies were served and he'd go in for fifteen minutes, give a short speech,

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step around and say "hello" to people, and off to the next one.

SOHIER: There must have been a few disasters? Can you think of any?

BILLINGS: I can't really think of any. It was the most fantastically, successful operation. We were all working terribly hard. I'm sure my headquarters was the same as every other. We encouraged volunteers to come in. We didn't have a lot of money and we didn't want to spend a lot of money on addressing envelopes and everything. We had mailings going out all the time. We were constantly going over the voting lists to find where the Democrats were. We had four or five telephones going all the time, with volunteer girls calling up and getting out the vote and encouraging people to vote for Jack Kennedy. We had

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people personally calling on every Democratic house. We were well-organized as an unorganized group could be. We used to stay until three or four in the morning. I remember in our headquarters in Cambridge even the young people who were going to school would stay that late. We'd send all of the girls home in taxis to make sure that they'd get home all right.

SOHIER: What about the campaign against the Republican nominee? Was that just sort of a small part of the process?

BILLINGS: Well, I wasn't even there. I don't think anybody was there. There were no Republicans in the act. I remember one thing that is interesting to talk about is the victory because that was terribly exciting, and it was Jack Kennedy's first taste of victory. He never

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was anything but victorious all his political life but this was his first time. It was just about one of the most exciting nights I can remember.

SOHIER: I have to impress on you that the election victory was of no interest to anybody because the district was predominantly Democratic. I remember, in the case of Cambridge we had every district of the eleven or twelve districts completely organized. We tried to know where every single Democratic voter lived in each district. We had people who'd lived in each district all their lives stationed at the polls. This all takes a lot of organization. Remember we were all amateurs, and all very young. There weren't any old people at all. Everybody

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was either a young veteran or a young girl. I remember, in the case of Cambridge, we had taxis and volunteers to take voters to the polls. We tried to get as many volunteers with cars as we could, but we also had to hire an awful lot of taxis and these were all sent to addresses of Democrats who hadn't voted. Consequently we had I don't know how many phones in headquarters to find out why people weren't voting and if they needed rides, etc. I remember one experience at the end of the evening, before votes were even counted. All the taxi drivers came into headquarters to get paid. I had a certain amount of money there. Headquarters was jammed packed. We had rather a big headquarters, somebody had given us an old office.

SOHIER: This was all in Cambridge?

BILLINGS: Yes, this was in Cambridge. I

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remember suddenly all the lights went out and there was a tremendous drive toward the little office where I was with the money. It was only through the efforts of some of our great volunteers that we were kept from being robbed. I remember particularly that it was a young volunteer — Jack Fallon — who blocked the door. Later, when we knew that Jack had won, it was terribly exciting because, of course, he came around to every headquarters. It was so much more of a personal thing — not just to me, who knew Jack well, but for every single person who had worked so hard for this victory. I'll never forget when he came into headquarters. It was incredible because he knew exactly how to show his appreciation to those who had worked so hard for him. Of course, he was building loyalties which he kept until the day he died. I

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remember he brought his mother and father and his grandfather and grandmother and the five of them went to every headquarters in the whole district. I had never been so proud of anyone in my life.

SOHIER: Now, having been elected, he moved to Washington. I guess at this point, in 1946, you entered the Business School.

BILLINGS: Obviously I had had to put off the Business School until the Fall term.

SOHIER: You put it off for a half a year, did you?

BILLINGS: As I recall, they had a term about every three months in those days because of the accelerated program, and I think I went in September.

SOHIER: Is that the September of 1946?

BILLINGS: During the summer I went down to South

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America.

SOHIER: In other words, this particular phase of his political career was ended. When he was down in Washington, were you involved in that at all?

BILLINGS: No, because as soon as I came back from South America, I went right into Harvard Business School. The Business School was, of course, in his district, and he came up a lot. I remember seeing him whenever he came up to Cambridge. I really got very discouraged at one time at Harvard because in those days I think they had something like 400 men in a class and although it seems impossible something like 20,000 had applied. Anyway, there was a tremendous number of applicants in those days after the war, when everybody was using the [Government Issue] GI Bill for educational purposes. I got terribly discouraged.

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It was just one of those bad days when I felt very low. I can remember how he spent a lot of time encouraging me. He was a very sympathetic guy, Jack Kennedy — he wasn't when you didn't need him but if you ever needed his help, he was always understanding.

SOHIER: He would quickly know that you were down by knowing you as well as he did?

BILLINGS: Yes, he would. Otherwise, he never was a bit emotional or anything like that and he never showed any great affection for anybody. But if you needed him, he was sensitive enough to understand it and he'd spend whatever time was necessary in helping you.

SOHIER: During 1946 to 1948, his first term in Congress, did you ever go down to Washington to visit? Where did he live?

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BILLINGS: Yes, I did. I know exactly where he lived. He lived on 31st Street in Georgetown.

SOHIER: Did he live with Eunice at this point?

BILLINGS: No, it was later that he lived with Eunice in another house in Georgetown. He took down with him a guy named George Taylor, who was a colored man from Cambridge — who had worked in the campaign. George had also worked as a sort of valet for Jack when he was at Harvard. He became a full-fledged valet for him when he went to Washington. He also took Margaret Ambrose, who was the Kennedy family's cook, an old Irish girl who had been with the Kennedys for years and years. I don't know how he convinced her to go, or how he got her away from his family because she was a fabulous cook.

SOHIER: He lived alone, did he?

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BILLINGS: He lived alone with George and Margaret.

SOHIER: That was sort of funny for him, wasn't it at this point? Or didn't it strike him that way?

BILLINGS: At this point, let's say, Jack was twenty-nine years old and a Congressman. On top of that he had a lot of dough. He had been living well for quite a few years.

SOHIER: What kind of life did he lead down here? Did you get much of that?

BILLINGS: Yes, I did come down whenever I could. I stayed at his house a lot. When he was invited out to dinner, he'd take me along and he was invited to a lot of interesting houses. I can't remember those dinners very well. However, when he was President he used to like to walk a bit and one time when we were walking around

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Lafayette Square, followed, of course, by all the Secret Service, he said he had never been in Decatur House since it has become a museum. So we stopped and went in and surprised the caretakers. I don't know who was the last owner but it was an old lady. Do you remember her name?

SOHIER: No.

BILLINGS: When he was a young Congressman this old lady used to invite him to her dinners. The caretaker had been one of her servants. The caretaker told us that her favorite story for tourists was about him when he was a Congressman. Apparently this had been one of the great social houses of Washington. He had been invited to dine but he had been mixed up as to the time and was the last guest to arrive. This was an unheard of sin in this particular house. Apparently, the caretaker never tired

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of telling how this young freshman Congressman had been the last one there and had held up the grand old lady's dinner. The President didn't particularly enjoy this story.

SOHIER: He was elected to Congress in 1946, he was re-elected in 1948 and he was re-elected in 1950. He was down here in Washington a good long time. Are there things during this period that stand out in your memory? He was living here. I guess he was going to the Cape; he was going to Florida; he was going back to Massachusetts and, of course, ultimately he was running for the Senate. During this period, I guess you saw a lot of him one and off.

BILLINGS: I probably didn't because....

SOHIER: That's right; you were gone.

BILLINGS: After I finished Harvard Business School

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I went to work for the General Shoe Corporation in Nashville and I lived Nashville from 1948 through 1951. I did come back for vacations and I went to Florida for some of the Christmases and in the summer went to the Cape when I could.

SOHIER: His regular Washington life was something you didn't share during this period?

BILLINGS: At that time, no, not at all. I think he lived with Eunice for part of the period, in a bigger house, still in Georgetown however.

SOHIER: And there's no particular thing you can think of, right now anyway, that stands out during that period?

BILLINGS: No, I'm very black during that period.

SOHIER: In 1952 he started to show an interest

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in running for the Senate and, of course, did take on Henry Cabot Lodge.

BILLINGS: Of course, that was another turning point of his career. It was a very daring thing for him to do — in a Republican year, to run against the incumbent Senator with a name like Lodge. Remember Lodge was very deeply involved with the presidential candidate.

SOHIER: He was campaign manager, in fact, which may have been of help to JFK.

BILLINGS: He may have been. Yet, still, Lodge was a very formidable opponent. And, again, it was one of the great indications of Jack Kennedy's courage because this was a very difficult decision for him to make. It is important to remember, however, that Jack Kennedy was ambitious — he had been thinking of being senator or

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governor for sometime — and in the late 1940s and early 1950s — he covered the state on speaking engagements every weekend.

SOHIER: How did he decide to run? Were you involved in that decision?

BILLINGS: I wasn't involved. I was in Nashville. Of course, he wanted to move up. He'd been in Congress then for three terms, one of his very powerful assets was that he was so damned ambitious, very competitive and obviously was thinking of the next move.

SOHIER: You say ambitious; I'm always interested in the word ambitious. Ambitious for what?

BILLINGS: Ambitious for himself to advance. He had confidence in himself. He felt he could contribute; that he could contribute more in a higher office. I know

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there was a discussion about whether he should run for governor or senator. I can't remember what the problems were in the governorship.

SOHIER: There was talk about that?

BILLINGS: Oh, yes, there were discussions about whether he should run for governor. I can't remember who was even governor then, but I know, weighing it all out, it was....

SOHIER: It was probably [Christian A.] Herter.

BILLINGS: It can be pretty easily looked up. But, anyway, whoever it was, it was his decision — this I know — that he would go out for the Senate. And everybody thought he was crazy — everybody.

SOHIER: Who's everybody? Did his father say, "you're nuts?"

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BILLINGS: I don't know about his father. I really don't remember.

SOHIER: Do you mean the politicians?

BILLINGS: I'm just saying that the general feeling was that Jack Kennedy was crazy to run against Lodge at that time.

SOHIER: Why did he feel that it wasn't crazy?

BILLINGS: Well, because he had confidence in himself. There's no question about it — he had a lot of confidence. He thought he could win. He felt that nobody would work harder than he was willing to work, and he was willing to work as hard as physically possible and, historically, I don't know if anybody has ever been a harder campaigner than he was. I think he had confidence that he had a good intellect; he had a good mind, and he

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was able to express himself. I think he did have confidence in being an articulate speaker and being able to communicate. And I know he felt that he could best Lodge.

SOHIER: What was his reaction to Lodge? I come from Massachusetts and Lodge has not always been the most popular figure, whereas Jack Kennedy had an awful lot of popular appeal, which I don't think Lodge ever had.

BILLINGS: Well, Lodge did have popular appeal. If you go back, you'll see he did have a great deal of popular appeal, particularly for the women's vote, and remember Lodge was attractive, good-looking, he was articulate enough, and he'd done a decent job as a senator. He was very much in the public eye at that time, with his closeness to Eisenhower, who certainly was popular. Yes, he was as formidable an opponent as he could have had;

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the Lodge name was extremely good in Massachusetts, even though there's a very great proportion of Irish up there, Irishmen have respect for a name like Lodge.

SOHIER: What was your involvement in this?

BILLINGS: I didn't have any involvement, because you have to remember that I was having to build a career of my own. At this point, I had just changed jobs in that, in 1952 I had become Advertising Director of Emerson Drug Company in Baltimore. This was a big break in my business career, and I was a little above my head in that job at first. I couldn't even think about that campaign and didn't.

SOHIER: So that all you know about it was only what you heard as a friend?

BILLINGS: The night of his election, I went up there and spent the evening with him and his family, and

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that's all. I didn't contribute anything; I was just there for the glory.

SOHIER: I remember at the time the Lodge people said the Kennedys had bought the election. They said that if you spend enough money, anybody can get in, and that's what happened in the case of Kennedy versus Lodge. Was there any rancor about this in the Kennedy family? What's there to it? I realize you weren't there but....

BILLINGS: You mean the fact that the President spent a lot of money?

SOHIER: Yes — a tremendous amount of money.

BILLINGS: I don't know of what proportions his expenditures were against Lodge — probably he spent more money. He had more money; he probably spent more money. He had more money; he probably spent more money. There are rules up there but I suppose possibly that there

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may be ways of getting around the rules. Actually, it's impossible to buy an election. You first have to have the staff and Jack Kennedy proved again and again that he had what it takes.

SOHIER: I raised this only to see if there were sensitivities.

BILLINGS: None at all. In my own mind, I know Jack Kennedy was never elected because of the money he spent. I think it certainly didn't hurt him, but I know that money isn't going to put you into office. I don't think historically that you will find anybody who was elected on money alone.

SOHIER: We're moving up to the point, I think, when he got married. Before that, there's one other little miscellaneous thing I want to discuss and that's his eating habits. He had, I guess, a bad stomach; he

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had malaria — I don't know if that affected it; he had a bad back — I don't know if that affected what he ate. What did he eat during this period and what did he eat throughout his life?

BILLINGS: At Choate, he had to eat at a special table. Probably like every school, they had a special dietary table for people who had health problems and he always ate at that table. Possibly he got more milk and custards than other people, I don't know. Apparently he had some problems then. I don't really remember exactly what the food was but it was different food than the food the rest of us ate. When we were in Europe, I don't remember any particular problems about finding the food that was proper for him or that he had any real stomach problem. I think, as I said before, throughout my whole

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life with Jack, I think of him as normally having a stomachache.

SOHIER: Always having one?

BILLINGS: Yes.

SOHIER: But not complaining about it?

BILLINGS: No.

SOHIER: How did you know he had it?

BILLINGS: Somehow I knew. Maybe he might have said something about it. I was just conscious that he had one most of the time. That didn't mean that he couldn't laugh or he couldn't have fun.

SOHIER: How can you be fun and have a stomachache? I don't understand that.

BILLINGS: That's because you and I don't have stomachaches all the time, so it's a very special thing with us.

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But if you have one all the time, what other choice do you have unless you're just going to fold up? And he wasn't the kind that would do that? But later, when he was in Washington, I know Margaret Ambrose cooked very special things and his menu at his house was always very much the same. I think it was what might be called "white food." I don't know whether that's the right word for it but I know that there were always creamed soups and usually creamed chicken or creamed something in the way of meat — usually the same. I think he ate an awfully lot of creamed chicken and mostly his vegetables consisted of fresh vegetables mashed.

SOHIER: Pureed, yes.

BILLINGS: Yes, but he liked desserts and he was great for ice cream and chocolate sauce.

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SOHIER: He liked Schrafft's in Boston on Tremont Street, didn't he?

BILLINGS: Yes, and all the Kennedy family are crazy about ice cream and cake and stuff like that. He seemed to have no trouble eating desserts. That was generally what he ate all his life. I think, in the later years of the Presidency, he did have a great desire for fish chowder, which was specially made for him with a great deal of cream and everything. I can hardly remember a family meal, whether it was at Glen Ora or in the family part of the White House when fish chowder wasn't served.

SOHIER: I recall his eating sometimes before he went out for dinner.

BILLINGS: I don't think he ever ate when he was out for dinner. This is particularly true if he were going

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on those long trips or when he was campaigning. Let's talk about that. When he was campaigning, he never ate at these many, many dinners. He always had his food at the hotel before he went out.

SOHIER: On this eating business, was this because of a particular stomach problem — the pains — or because he just wanted what he wanted?

BILLINGS: No, I think that certain foods agreed with him and certain foods didn't. I think that he found through the years what was best for him.

SOHIER: I get the feeling that the stomach thing improved later when he was in the White House. I certainly have seen him eat roast beef and sort of normal food.

BILLINGS: Oh, I guess that sometimes it was good and sometimes it wasn't. I don't think that there was ever

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anytime that you'd say that his stomach in 1962 was better than it was in 1948.

SOHIER: I just wasn't a bad stomach all along but it varied?

BILLINGS: Yes — but more often troublesome than not. I've heard it called a nervous stomach. Funnily enough, Eunice has always had it also. She says it feels as though her stomach were tied in knots. Jack's mother had the same problem for years.

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