

Grace Burke, Oral History Interview – 5/13/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Burke was a secretary in John F. Kennedy's (JFK) Boston office from 1946-1963, and later a secretary for Senator Edward Moore Kennedy. In this interview, she discusses the staff and operations of JFK's Boston office during his years in Congress, his health, and his personality and temperament, among other issues.

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Grace Burke

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Oral History Interview

with

Grace Burke

May 13, 1964

Boston, Massachusetts

By Edward Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: The following interview is with Miss Grace Burke of Boston, the first secretary of the late President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] when he was a freshman congressman. You remained in the Boston office right through the entire career of President Kennedy and continued as a secretary to Senator Edward M. Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy]. This interview was done without her knowing, it was later played for her, she gave full permission for its use. The interview took place May 13, 1961.

Actually, Grace when you first began with him, did he hire you as a secretary? This was before he got elected? Then you went to work in his office here as his legislative secretary.

BURKE: Yes, afterwards. I only went in to work for the campaign really.

MARTIN: You mean when they had the headquarters?

BURKE: At the headquarters—18 Tremont Street, a little bit of a place.

MARTIN: What were you, Grace? Were you first a volunteer?

BURAE: No. Well, I'll tell you; Joe Kane [Joseph F. Kane] sent for me. Joe Kane is

Joe Kennedy's [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] first cousin. He asked me if I'd like to go down there. I said,

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"Well, I don't know." I just got through a job. The man I worked for died; he was a lawyer. I said, "I know that campaigns were such wonderful things. I don't know if I could stand it." Or something like that. I went down, and I worked through. Yes, I was a paid worker.

MARTIN: You had never been in a political campaign before?

BURKE: No. Never.

MARTIN: What did you do before this? You were a secretary?

BURKE: To a lawyer. Mostly lawyers I've worked for.

MARTIN: So this was somewhat of a new experience for you.

BURKE: Oh, very new. Yes.

MARTIN: Then you worked throughout his campaign. Did you come from around Boston, Grace?

BURKE: Yes. The West End.

MARTIN: Which was part of the congressional district that he ran for Congress.

BURKE: Yes. The one who vacated was Curley [James Michael Curley].

MARTIN: Let me ask you this: when Jack was first elected to Congress, he had his back injury then, didn't he?

BURKE: Yes, his back was very bad, but he never, never complained. Never. But you could see.

MARTIN: You never saw any signs of it?

BURKE: Well, you could see his back was tired, and you could see him sort of lean up against things, if we were alone in the room, or something like that.

MARTIN: Who else was in the office here, Grace?

BURKE: Up at 18?

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MARTIN: No, I mean when he got elected and came back in here.

BURKE: Frank Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey]. Then a few weeks later.... The Congressman at that time wanted to get somebody of Italian extraction, really, so he hired this Joe Rosetti [Joseph E. Rosetti], who was never in politics, but a very fine boy.

MARTIN: Isn't he down in the White House now?

BURKE: State Department. He's got a nice job.

MARTIN: So that actually you had two legislative assistants here and yourself as secretary in the Boston office. Was it busy in those days?

BURKE: Very. Awfully busy. I never got through work sometimes until half past seven at night, seven to half past seven.

MARTIN: What type of requests were you getting then?

BURKE: Well, the same as we're getting now, the Navy Yard, the Arsenal, people out of jobs and trying to get jobs. It's all the same thing as it is now after all those years.

MARTIN: But, of course, Grace, right after the war you had tremendous problems in veterans' affairs.

BURKE: Oh, all the veterans' affairs and disability, all the disability claims they were trying to get. What was the other thing that was.... There was some other thing that I forget now. It was something to do with the veterans; some sort of claims they had that didn't go through, so we'd try and hurry them through.

MARTIN: And, also, the GI bill for schooling, Grace.

BURKE: Oh, yes. The schooling was another one. They used to go from one school.... They'd get tired of one

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and go to another and another; they'd go from hair dressing to banjo playing. Finally, they had to shut that right down. They could go to one, and that was it.

MARTIN: Did the President then spend a lot of time up here in Boston?

BURKE: Well, more then because he had to run every two years. He was in here a

great deal.

MARTIN: Who were some of the people, Grace, that were close to him then? In his first congressional career.

BURKE: Let me see.

MARTIN: Billy Sutton [William J. Sutton] was one.

BURKE: Billy Sutton. Of course, he went to Washington.

MARTIN: Yes, Billy went down.

BURKE: Of course, Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith II], Dick Flood [Richard Flood], and Tom Bilodeau [Thomas H. Bilodeau]. But politically, I don't know who was very close to him.

MARTIN: I also would like to know who worked out of his Washington office. Who was his secretary?

BURKE: Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]. And Billy Sutton was there. And Mary Davis. She was a tremendous girl. Whatever I know, I learned from her. Oh, she was a wonder. She could do the work of three people, I think.

MARTIN: But you stayed right on in the Boston office. He went through, what was it, three terms as a congressman?

BURKE: Yes. Six years.

MARTIN: Yes. And then he decided to go for Senate. Did you think he could lick Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] at that time, Grace?

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BURKE: At first I didn't. His back was bothering him then badly; he was on crutches, I said to myself, "Oh, I wish he'd wait awhile." But he didn't want to run against Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall]. He had great respect for Senator Saltonstall.

MARTIN: That respect persisted right through....

BURKE: Yes, it did. Yes.

MARTIN: Saltonstall's office actually is just down the hall from here, isn't it?

BURKE: Yes, it is. And it was down there, too, when they went in the Senate. They were very friendly, the two offices.

MARTIN: Grace, they had an unusual policy of putting out joint releases.

BURKE: Yes, they did.

MARTIN: I understand Senator Saltonstall and Senator Ted Kennedy today do the same thing.

BURKE: I think they do. That's nice.

MARTIN: Did he ever discuss his chances of defeating Lodge when he'd come into the office?

BURKE: Yes, he did, but....

MARTIN: He appeared confident, no doubt.

BURKE: I think yes and no. He was going to work hard for it, and he did. He didn't pull any stops. He did everything he possibly could.

MARTIN: Grace, in his early years as a congressman, did any of the family come in frequently to visit him in his office here in Boston?

BURKE: Well, they didn't come up to Boston too much. Sometimes the girls would come in. Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] I knew better than the others.

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But Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith] and Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] didn't come in much. I think Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] would once in a while. I don't know whether Teddy came in while he was in Congress or not. Probably in the Senate.

MARTIN: I should imagine there'd be an awful lot of telephone conversations going on between the individual members of the family though.

BURKE: Oh, yes, they were...

MARTIN: Who did he talk to most, Grace?

BURKE: His family?

MARTIN: Among his brothers and sisters.

BURKE: Well, I really wouldn't know. I think he talked a great deal to his father. I think he talked to him a great deal.

MARTIN: Did the father come in and out of the office?

BURKE: Well, once in a while, Not too often. Oh, he'd call up if he wanted something done, some little errand, you know, or to get in touch with somebody.

MARTIN: But the phones were busy right back at the beginning, and they never let up.

BURKE: No, they didn't.

MARTIN: But how about after he became Senator? Did he....

BURKE: Then Mary Boylan came to work here. No. Another girl came first. Helen.... I forget what her name was. A friend of Frank's. Helen Doyle. She came in, and she was here for the.... Oh, she came at the end of.... He was going to close up the office then. No, I think when he was running. She must have been at the end of about '46 or '48. Then we had Mary Boylan. Of course, at that time he didn't come up so often. He'd come up for speaking engagements. He did quite a bit, though, now that I think of it, because he wanted to get a big vote, you see, for his second term, which he did, of course.

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MARTIN: That was when he ran against Vincent Celeste [Vincent J. Celeste].

BURKE: I don't know why he was worried about that.

MARTIN: Grace, during his career as a Senator, now, there was a period there, of course, when he was quite ill.

BURKE: Oh, yes. Yes. That was the year after he was married. He was married in '53 I think, and it was the next year that he went to the hospital, '54.

MARTIN: Then he was in the hospital for a long period of recuperation.

BURKE: Oh, a long time, yes. His father was very worried about him. He used to call up every day. Then he said, finally, about two weeks afterwards, which surprised me.... I guess he was failing a little bit. You see, Jack wasn't very strong. He didn't get his strength back, or enough of it back.

MARTIN: He did too much, too.

BURKE: Oh, I know it. That campaign would kill anybody who was twice as healthy as he was, I would think. So one day he says, "The only thing that will save him now is prayer," Mr. Kennedy said. Then, of course, he went to Palm Beach and stayed a long time.

MARTIN: Did he communicate with the office at all? Did he telephone while he was recuperating?

BURKE: Oh, yes. Yes. Calling up to see what the news releases were, you know, as to what was in the paper. Of course, Ted [Ted Reardon] did a lot of calling.

MARTIN: Who ran the office while he was in the hospital?

BURKE: Ted did.

MARTIN: Out of Washington?

BURKE: Oh, yes. Yes.

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MARTIN: Then, of course, a lot of the business kind of transferred itself down there, Grace?

BURKE: Well, yes, a lot of it did. It seemed to be a little bit different, too.

MARTIN: But by then you were so pretty well versed in how to handle various requests that you could in all probability put them through on your own, Grace, couldn't you?

BURKE: Oh, yes. I could do most everything. If I couldn't, I'd send it down, and Ted would do it.

MARTIN: When you mentioned the wedding, Grace, were you invited to it?

BURKE: Oh, yes.

MARTIN: Did you go? You didn't go?

BURKE: Is this thing on?

MARTIN: No.

BURKE: I bet it is. No.

MARTIN: This fascinates me, Grace, because you were right in with him from the beginning. You worked through the Senate fight. Now about the time he decided to go for... I think it was in 1958, I think, he went out to the National Convention and was suddenly a candidate....

BURKE: For vice president. Oh, I was praying he wouldn't get it. I suppose I was the only one that wasn't.

MARTIN: Why?

BURKE: Oh, I don't know. That would be the end of him running for president, I think. I didn't think Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] would ever get, it for one thing. Did you?

MARTIN: No.

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BURKE: I was hoping he wouldn't because...

MARTIN: But you had no idea that he was suddenly going to emerge as a vice presidential candidate?

BURKE: No. Of course, it was a wonderful thing for him, for his career later. Everything happens for the best, they say. So that evidently did.

MARTIN: You were probably listening to the radio at the time?

BURKE: We had the television then.

MARTIN: Oh, you had the television. But, Grace, after that he came back and kind of settled back in the Senate. Then he began moving nationally quite a bit.

BURKE: Oh, yes. Then he'd go all over the country.

MARTIN: But did he come into the Boston office? You know, how often did he come in here?

BURKE: Well, quite often I would see him. We used to sit in here, then, and I'd look up and there he was walking in the room. Oh, everything would light up when Jack would spring in the room. You know, he had sort of a springing walk and a nice smile on his face.

MARTIN: But he'd come in unannounced, of course?

BURKE: Oh, yes. He would never know when he was coming in.

MARTIN: Then would he stay long?

BURKE: Well, quite a while. He'd walk over and see what was doing, who was doing what and why.

MARTIN: But you stayed close to him all along?

BURKE: Oh, yes. It was a great pleasure to know him. He never, never was upset about anything. I mean, as far as I was concerned. I was proud to know him.

MARTIN: A lot of people say, Grace, that he was in constant

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agony. This is what I'm getting from the tapes. And he would never let on to it.

BURKE: Never. He'd call up from the hospital. He'd be in the hospital quite a bit, and he didn't want the reporters to know he was up here, because they'd put it in the paper. He'd call up, and I sometimes wouldn't know he was up there. Right off, he'd say, "How are you, Grace?" I said, "How are you?" "In the hospital," he'd say. "I'm fine. I'm fine." In the hospital, he never would complain. Of course, he used to go in there for a rest mostly.

MARTIN: What were some of the thing that made him great, Grace? What would you say was the most outstanding quality he had about him?

BURKE: Well, he was very kind, and he'd never hurt anybody. He'd have to get very upset about something before he'd get angry.

MARTIN: Did he occasionally get upset?

BURKE: Oh, yes. Some things would upset him.

MARTIN: What type of things? Somebody on his staff?

BURKE: Well, not so much that. But, if he asked somebody to do something, and they didn't do it right when he gave them all the instructions how to do it, he'd get kind of upset about that if it threw his plans all out. But little things never bothered him.

MARTIN: Did you ever get a scolding from him?

BURKE: Never. Never. I don't think he did scold too many people.

MARTIN: But he was a dynamic personality, though.

BURKE: He was. I don't think I've ever met a person like him. You know, just to look at him he was...

MARTIN: Grace, what was the occasion when he came up here as President and took you in to vote? How was that arranged? I mean, did you know in advance?

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BURKE: Well, no. Bob Morey [Robert F. Morey] was with him that night. He was only here for that night, you see. He didn't go into Teddy's place at all, did he? I mean, the campaign headquarters.

MARTIN: No. No, he just stayed at the hotel.

BURKE: So, he'd always say, "How's Grace? How's Grace?" to Bob. Then he says to Bob, "Well, bring her up to the hotel in the morning." And he said, "Oh, no, don't bring her up here. I'll never have a chance to talk to her. Bring her down to the voting booth." See, I vote there, too, in the West End.

MARTIN: Oh, yes. You live over on...

BURKE: But I voted across the street in the church. So there we were. He looked younger than ever.

MARTIN: Well, what did he do? Did he take you right through the police lines?

BURKE: Yes. Well I had.... Oh, all the secret police were there. Nobody could.... I had to be, I don't know what you would call it, waiting for him with Bob.

MARTIN: But Bob had alerted you in the morning.

BURKE: Oh, yes, yes. I couldn't have got in there; I couldn't have got in the line. Frank McDermott [Francis McDermott] was there and all the policemen and the Secret Service men.

MARTIN: Grace, he didn't instruct you as to how to vote or whom to vote for?

BURKE: No. No. Once, a few times as the years went by, but I'm not going to talk

about that.

MARTIN: No, I know you're not.

BURKE: He never instructed anybody. I mean, he'd just say it, you know.

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MARTIN: But could you see way back in the beginning, Grace, that he had possibilities of becoming president?

BURKE: Oh, I did. I did. Yes.

MARTIN: Did you ever feel that someday he'd be president?

BURKE: I did because I said to him lots of times, "Jack, I know you'll be President, but I'll never live that long, Jack." Because I had thought it might be twenty or thirty years from now.

MARTIN: But, you know, Grace, during that year that he campaigned for president, that was probably the most exciting year you can remember.

BURKE: Oh, I know it. Yes.

MARTIN: Moving around the country. And he'd come up to Boston. When he'd come into Boston on the campaign trail, would he come up to the office? Did you get to see him?

BURKE: I think I saw him once, but he'd call me. If he came in, he'd always call me.

MARTIN: Grace, when was the last time you saw him?

BURKE: That day of the voting.

MARTIN: Which was in.... That was the day....

BURKE: This is when Teddy got elected.

MARTIN: Yes, in 1962.

BURKE: And I said I wonder if he'll be here this, year, '64, I have to go down and vote with him. But he's still up there.

MARTIN: But, you know, Grace, when he was elected, during the Inaugural.... I

assume you got invited down, but did you go down?

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BURKE: No, I didn't go down. I had a very bad cold. I was going down to see it with Mary Boylan, but I had a bad, bad cold. As it was, I said to Jack afterwards, I was glad to sit in that chair and watch everything on the television.

MATRIN: Oh, yes. That was the best seat there was because I remember they had a bad snow storm the day he was inaugurated.

BURKE: Oh, awful. Some of the people never got out of the hotels. I'll tell you how thoughtful he was; one time that he went to Rome, he brought me a pair of beads blessed by the Pope. He and Torbie [Torbert H. MacDonald] were together. Torbie said, "Yes, I brought one for my mother, and he brought one for you. We both held them up together."

MARTIN: Do you have any other mementoes that he gave you?

BURKE: Yes. Then he brought me a beautiful scarf, another trip to Rome. You know, he bought these things himself, which I think is wonderful. I wear the scarf occasionally, but I don't want to wear it out, I guess.

MARTIN: Did you ever go down to the White House, Grace, at all?

BURKE: Oh, I had a wonderful trip down there. Bobby arranged that. Jack had called me a couple of nights back in November, I think, of the year that he went in. That would be '62. I guess they were alone. Jacqueline [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], his wife, was up here. He and Dave [David F. Powers] were having a good time together, babysitting with each other, I suppose. Dave got on the line, and he says, "Here's your old pal." And then he put Jack on. You know how it is, I thought he was kidding. I didn't know that they were all in the White House, and that he was just staying there with him. I said, "I don't think it's you, Jack. You've lost your Harvard accent." And he says, "No! No! Grace, what's the matter with you?" I said, "Well, I get it now a little bit." So he said, "When are you coming down to lunch?" I said, "I'm coming down tomorrow." But he really called me twice, and I said, "I'll do it, Jack. I'll do it." So about a month later, Bobby came up. He was down here visiting. I guess he was going through all the offices in the city down with the Justice

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Department. He came up to see me, and he arranged it all. "When are you coming down?" he said. "I want you to see my family, too. And I know you've got an invitation at the White House, but you haven't kept it yet." So the first thing I know, Bob say, "We're going to

Washington tomorrow.” So that was it. It happened that he was having a party for his staff, and there I was; I met people that I’d talked to on the phone for years, I never had seen.

MARTIN: Honestly.

BURKE: I said to Bobby, “That’s the best Christmas present I’ve ever had.” It was just a little before Christmas.

MARTIN: Did you get a tour of the White House?

BURKE: Oh, yes. About two hours we were. We had a special tour man.

MARTIN: Of course, you got into the President’s office.

BURKE: Oh, yes. He says, “What are you doing down here, Grace?” I said, “I’ve come down to see you.” Oh, it was awfully nice. That man was painting his picture then.

MARTIN: Oh, yes. Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] was there then.

BURKE: Yes, she was there. I knew Evelyn.

MARTIN: Oh course, you remember Evelyn goes back quite a way.

BURKE: She went to work in ‘53 there as his secretary.

MARTIN: That was the only visit you had down there?

BURKE: That’s the only one, and I’ll never, never have another one because I don’t ever want to go in there again.

MARTIN: Do you know, Grace, in many cases there was some criticism of the President when he was a congressman and a senator on which they said he went down to Washington, and he became nationally and internationally minded; that he’s like all the other congressmen; they go off and they forget about the people back home? Do you think this would be unfair

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criticism of him?

BURKE: It’s unfair, but I never heard any around here. People, of course, up here loved him. I didn’t hear of him anywhere but....

MARTIN: But apparently there must have been many, many cases of people that were helped through this office when he was a congressman.

BURKE: Oh, yes.

MARTIN: They ran into the thousands.

BURKE: Oh, I wish you'd seen what I threw out. Files and files and files.

MARTIN: Grace, how about the immigration cases?

BURKE: Oh, yes, we had a lot of those.

MARTIN: ...Some pretty pathetic cases?

BURKE: Yes. And then, when the President was Senator, he put through a couple of good bills. I don't just know what the bills said in substance, but people that had waited for years were able to come over, people who had been on the register for ten, fifteen years.

MARTIN: Well, he was lauded by various racial groups for his efforts in behalf of changing the immigration laws and easing some of the restrictions.

BURKE: Oh, yes. He was. I think the biggest group that were helped were the Italians because they had a big waiting list there and a small quota. And Greece, too, but there didn't seem to be so many Greeks on the register. Of course, there are now. But there were a lot of Italians. Of course, they were a bigger country I suppose. Isn't it?

MARTIN: Would you say, Grace, that the fact that he was such an outgoing figure and so popular, and the Kennedy name, would attract more people coming into his office for requests than, say, for some other congressman?

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BURKE: Oh, yes, I would say so. I would think so. I think it would make a difference.

MARTIN: Yes. You're seeing it also today, now, as secretary for Senator Ted Kennedy.

BURKE: They used to come in and say, "Well, if Kennedy can't do it, nobody can do it."

MARTIN: Yes?

BURKE: That's what.... I don't think even the Pope could have done some of the

things that they wanted. But they had so much faith in him, you know, that you really tried hard to do things for them.

MARTIN: Grace, can you remember some of the amusing incidents that occurred from time to time? He was a great practical jokester. I think every member of the Kennedy family is.

BURKE: It's funny; they are. You wouldn't think that Jack was if you were talking to him here soberly. But I can't really remember. He used to have fun with Billy, you know, more than.... I wouldn't see them in the antics.

MARTIN: Of course, he was single in those days.

BURKE: Oh, yes. Yes.

MARTIN: But, then, it must have given you quite a thrill to see him on the news conferences. You knew, his wit was sharp.

BURKE: Oh, yes. I used to watch, and I used to say, "How he gets around those questions I don't know." He would answer them, but unless he wanted to, he wouldn't give the right answer, I don't think.

MARTIN: Grace, did you ever have an occasion to go down to Hyannis Port at all?

BURKE: No, I didn't. I was going down there one time to do some work for him, you know, over a weekend or something, but then some other girl went. I wasn't too keen on

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going, you know, so a younger girl went down. She was tickled to death to go. But I never went down there.

MARTIN: Grace, were you working here on November 22 when the tragedy happened down in Dallas?

BURKE: Yes.

MARTIN: How did you first get word of it?

BURKE: Well, I was going out to lunch, and it was late. I think it was about quarter of.... Mary and I were the only two in the office. I just put my hat on. She was on the phone, and I said, "I'm going out, Mary." She said, "I've got my sister on the.... She's watching television so she called me. She said the President's been shot." I said, "Oh, no! I don't believe it." And she said, "Wait a minute." So I waited, and I

think about five minutes later it came over that he was dead. I really didn't believe it because I thought, of course, they were.... You know how they exaggerate things about the President.

MARTIN: Sure.

BURKE: Oh, I just couldn't believe it.

MARTIN: That was a terrible three days and the week that followed, Grace. Did you come in to work here?

BURKE: No. I think we closed the office for a couple of days. Wasn't it on a Friday? Or was it.... Yes, it was a Friday. I don't think we came in Monday.

MARTIN: Do you have many things, Grace, that you have around the house, souvenirs or mementos?

BURKE: Well, no. I got a lot of pictures of him.

MARTIN: Autographed pictures?

BURKE: Well, yes and no. I never thought of getting any pictures from him, you know, and I really almost missed one while he was President. Dave Powers said to me one

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day, "Have you got an autographed picture of the President?" I said, "No. I never thought of getting one. I thought I'd wait." He said, "I'll send you one." So I have it. And the I have that picture of Jack and Teddy out at Boston College. I think you gave it to me.

MARTIN: Oh, that's wonderful.

BURKE: Then I got one from Bobby. It just came a couple weeks ago. He wrote a very nice autograph on it, if that's what you call it, thanking me for all the help to the three Kennedy boys. So I've got the three Kennedy boys together now in a spot in the same frame.

MARTIN: Grace, you had a lot of dealings from time to time, of course, with various members of the family. You had, also, a chance to see what a cohesive family it was. What would you say would set them apart from the average family?

BURKE: They were very close to each other. I think if you said anything about one member, the whole family would take offense at it. But they were very

loyal. And very loyal to people they knew, too. I would say that.

MARTIN: Do you think you're going to see another Kennedy in the White House?

BURKE: This time I don't think I'll live that long. But I think Teddy will be. I think he will be unless Bobby becomes vice president.

MARTIN: Grace, what would you say your best memory of the President was, or is?

BURKE: Well, this was a very funny experience. I think it was his second year in Congress. You see how long ago that was, when we had Hanover Street up there in the West End and Scollay Square.

MARTIN: 1948—1949.

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BURKE: '49. Right around there. He was marching on Columbus Day with the Italians. I knew he was going to march. I think I was coming up here to do some work anyhow; it was early in the morning. So I crossed over Hanover Street, and I just turned around and said, "It must be about time now." He was coming down the street all alone; nobody was near him, not surrounded like he is in some of the parades. He always wore a gray suit, and it was the most beautiful suit I've ever seen. I mean, it was a soft gray and a little bit of a blue line if you got up close to it. And he was coming dean, and his hair is flying a little bit. I said, "Boy, he looks wonderful, doesn't he." It was a wide, wide street, and I kept saying, when he got near enough to me, "Congressman, Congressman." He couldn't see who it was. So, finally, I had to get out in the road. Then I was walking up close to him. "Why," he says, "Grace, I'm glad to see you. What are you doing here?" I said, "I came out to see you march." And the cobblestones, you know, they were then. So he went down the street his hair flying and waving. Everybody was waving at him, then, too. He was just going down to the end, then they had something down at the North End, but I think he left right after that.

MARTIN: Grace, what made him attractive to women? I mean, he seemed to create lots of...

BURKE: Well, I think he didn't give them attention really, but when he looked at them, he just looked at them, and the women thought, I suppose, that she was the only one that he was interested in. He'd look at you, and no matter how many people were around he talked to you, and you'd feel, "Well, he's a nice fellow, isn't he?"

MARTIN: His physical appearance as President and that as Congressman was quite a contrast.

BURKE: It was. But I noticed when I went down to the White House that he looked just like he used to walk in that door. I said, "Jack, you don't look a bit like you do on television." I think he wore bigger suits or something on the television. And, of course, I hadn't seen him.

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MARTIN: Of course, you have an appearance, Grace, on television to look a little stouter than you actually are.

BURKE: Oh, you do?

MARTIN: But what I mean, though, he was kind of scrawny, wasn't he, as a congressman?

BURKE: Well, those first pictures were. After that he picked up quite a bit. I have one where he was marching.... That one on my desk there; that little picture where he's marching in one of those Saint Patrick Day parades. And that other one is taken out of *Newsweek*, I think, a couple of years ago. That's why I took it and put them together because there's not much difference in them.

MARTIN: Also, Grace, George Taylor [George H. Taylor] told me that he had some sort of an allergy; that he used to...

BURKE: Well, I never knew that. He had a.... Not asthma. That's what he said he had. He had malaria; he had that quite bad for a few years. But that was all cleared up.

MARTIN: Grace, let me ask you this: going back to some of the people who were with him at the start, I find that there are several that kind of became disenchanted or kind of drifted away as he moved on from congressman to senator and, later on, as President. What do you think would cause them to drift away?

BURKE: The ones that were with him in the beginning were only a few, really, who did really hard work, like Tom Broderick [Thomas Broderick] and that Kelly that you're going to see.

MARTIN: Oh, yes.

BURKE: Bill Kelly [William F. Kelly]. They always stayed with Jack, and he never would forget any of them. And they never forgot him. They were real workers. But I don't know what you mean by other people.

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MARTIN: Of course, those who had stayed with him were right there...

BURKE: Never left him. No.

MARTIN: Ted Reardon and Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], of course. And, of course, Dave Powers walked the streets of Charlestown with him.

BURKE: He did a lot of work. He's a great worker, Dave. He always liked Dave.

MARTIN: Do you hear from any of them now, Grace?

BURKE: Dave is the only one I talk to. I want to talk to Bobby, but I haven't been able to. I mean, I thought I'd wait a while. You know, I think he's gotten over it, but he looks so badly in his pictures and on television. I think he feels it worse than anybody. Every day, I suppose, he went to the White House.

MARTIN: But you're staying on now and working right through, and you're good for another fifty years.

BURKE: Well, I'd be put in a museum if I was, if I did live that long.

MARTIN: Is there anything else you recall about him that makes a fond memory? Apparently, that march...

BURKE: That march. I can always see that in my mind. Every time I used to go through.... Of course, I don't now because there isn't any street there. I'd always think of Jack marching down where I saw him, right at the top of the street. And he looked as if he was at the top of the world; he had that nice, springy walk and a smile on his face and his hair was always a little blowy in the wind.

MARTIN: Was he a man for detail, when he worked as a congressman?

BURKE: No. He was very easy to work for. Sometimes I used to have to type speeches for him. I only had a little while, and I'd say, "Oh, I have to do this over." "No, that's

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all right. I'll just cross it out." By that time, I think, he almost memorized them anyhow. It was very easy for him to memorize.

MARTIN: Sure. But how about as an administrator, keeping files and all that?

BURKE: Oh, that just didn't enter into his mind at all.

MARTIN: Was he much for detail?

BURKE: No. I wouldn't think so.

MARTIN: He operated on sort of directing others.

BUREE: Yes. And reading. He always read continuously. He could read so fast, you know. I watched him up in the apartment sometimes. I'd go up there to do something.

MARTIN: Was this when he was single?

BURKE: Yes. When he was in Congress. I didn't go up there, I don't think, after that. Well, he wasn't up there much when he was in the Senate, anyhow.

MARTIN: Hard work never seemed to faze him, and when he'd have a long line of appointments, he'd take each one in stride.

BURKE: Yes, but it was pretty hard for him a couple of times he was here. He went one day, and he was going to come in the next day. He said, "Oh, Grace, I can't do it. You'll have to call them off." He couldn't get used to the requests that they wanted. He didn't know so many people were, out of work and all that sort of thing.

MARTIN: Did that bother him?

BURKE: Yes. Very much. He didn't know there were so many poor people around.

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MARTIN: Did he ever come in here on crutches? There were periods there when...

BURKE: Yes, a few times. But not very much.

MARTIN: This has been an interview with Miss Grace Burke of Boston. The interviewer, Ed Martin. The date, May 13, 1964.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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