

Kay (Katherine Murphy) Halle Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 02/07/1967
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Biographical Note

(1904 - 1997) Journalist, author, socialite, and Kennedy family friend, discusses relationship with the Kennedy family and contact with JFK during his presidency, among other issues.

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Kay (Katherine Murphy) Halle – JFK#1

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Oral History Interview

With

Kay (Katherine Murphy) Halle

February 7, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By William M. McHugh

For the John F. Kennedy Library

McHUGH: This is an interview at the home of Kay Halle. Miss Halle's book, Irrepressible Churchill, A Treasury of Winston Churchill's Wit, was recently published. Miss Halle is also a long time friend of the Kennedy family. Miss Halle, when did you first meet President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

HALLE: I think I should go back and tell you, first...

McHUGH: Surely, would you please.

HALLE: ...how I came to know the whole family. It was through father Joseph P. Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]. Some of us—Jimmie [James Roosevelt] and Betsey Roosevelt [Betsey Cushing Roosevelt Whitney], and other members of the family and Mr. Roosevelt's [Franklin D. Roosevelt] staff were sitting in Mr. Roosevelt's suite at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, in Boston. It was the day of the night that Mr. Roosevelt was to speak in the Boston Garden during his first campaign for the Presidency. Mr. Hoover [Herbert Hoover], (it was the last day of the campaign) was speaking in New York in Madison Square Garden. We were all sitting together in Mr. Roosevelt's suite, Tugwell [Rexford G. Tugwell], Moley [Raymond Moley], Bob Sherwood [Robert E. Sherwood], and all of the group. Suddenly Felix Frankfurter came in—he then was a professor of law at Harvard. With him came a very attractive Irishman. He was unmistakably Irish, with

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his copper colored hair, and a beaming smile that exposed his shining teeth. He sat in the corner while a political argument was in progress and suggestions were under discussion for the upcoming speech. There was much coming and going in the room. I suddenly turned to Felix and asked, "Who is it that you brought with you? You haven't introduced him." Then Felix said, "Joe, tell them who you are." "I'm Joe Kennedy," he said, "Mr. Frankfurter brought me with him because, though I've been interested in all sorts of businesses in Boston and California—in films and banking and though "Honey" Fitzgerald [John Francis Fitzgerald], Mayor of Boston, is my father-in-law I've never had the thrill of being a part of a presidential campaign. So I've put some money into Mr. Roosevelt's campaign, and I'd like to go along with you all and take part in the fun." From then on he attached himself to us in a charming way. Mr. Roosevelt's eldest son, Jimmy, was then married to Betsey Cushing (now Mrs. John Hay Whitney), the daughter of the eminent brain surgeon, Dr. Harvey Cushing [Harvey Williams Cushing]. Dr. Cushing was then in Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, with, I think an ulcer. His daughters, Mary [Mary Benedict Cushing] and Betsey and I were going over to see him. Joe Kennedy asked me if he could come along and wait for me because he wanted me to go with him to see one of his sons who was in the same hospital. After visiting Dr. Cushing, Joe took me to his son Jack's room. He couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen. He'd had some football accident, and had developed what they thought was a sort of an anemia and Joe was a bit worried about it. Jack was lying in bed, very pale which highlighted the freckles across his nose. He was so surrounded by books I could hardly see him. I was very impressed, because at that point this very young child was reading The World Crisis, by Sir Winston Churchill.

McHUGH: Was he in the hospital long at that time?

HALLE: No, I don't think so. I think he was out very soon. But they were concerned about him because he had had some football injury, and I'm not sure exactly what it was.

McHUGH: And then when did you see him, or his family again?

HALLE: Well, of course, dating from that period, I saw a great deal of the family—at the first New Year's Party at the White House and then soon after Mr.

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Roosevelt's victory. I can remember crossing the ocean with Mary Cushing, Jimmy and Betsey Roosevelt, Joe and Rose [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] Kennedy, and young Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] whom big Joe was taking to the London School of Economics to study under Harold Laski. Father Joe Kennedy said that he felt that as the boys were going into a period where they ought to know just as much about the left as

the right in politics, he wanted them to study under a man that he thought would teach the left philosophy to them better than anybody, which was Harold Laski.

And then I didn't see much of Jack, except intermittently, until he came to Washington as a Congressman. He was just a young boy, before that, to me. When he came here as a Congressman I was very impressed with the way he had developed and his independence of thought. I remember one very vivid instance of it when we were all at a cocktail party in the garden of Drew [Drew Pearson] and Luvie Pearson [Luvie Moore Pearson]. Jack was there, with his father Joe, and I think Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy], as I remember it. In one corner of the garden father Joe, Jack and I were talking together. Suddenly Joe said, "Kay, I wish you would tell Jack that he's going to vote the wrong way." I can't even remember what bill it was, but Joe said, "I think Jack is making a terrible mistake." And then I remember Jack turning to his father and saying, "Now, look here Dad, you have your political views and I have mine. I'm going to vote exactly the way I feel I must vote on this. I've great respect for you, but when it comes to voting, I'm voting my way." Then Joe looked at me with that big Irish smile, and said, "Well, Kay, that's why I settled a million dollars on each one of them, so they could spit in my eye if they wished."

McHUGH: Did you have any other occasions to notice his independence, particularly, of his father?

HALLE: Well, I think both Jack and Bobby at various times talked to me about how much they owed to their father, and how much he'd done for them. He'd given them a superb education. I remember one instance of that. The late Ted Yates, who was killed reporting the six day Israeli-Arab war and won so many awards as documentary chief at NBC [National Broadcasting Company] went to school with Teddy Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] in Florida for one or two years. When they were young Ted Yates spent one Easter holiday with the Kennedy family in Palm Beach. I think the following illustrates my point. Ted Yates was brought up on a ranch in Wyoming and had had a very tough childhood learning to ride cowboy

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style and living in a part of the country where he had a really good chance for lots of athletic training. He told me that the toughest two weeks he'd ever spent was with the Kennedys. He told how their day commenced early in the morning, swimming, playing tennis, with also baseball, and sailing. After lunch, as they were reading the Federalist Papers, each of the boys, including even young Teddy, and Ted Yates had to take the part of Madison [James Madison], or Jefferson [Thomas Jefferson], or Hamilton [Alexander Hamilton] and argue the points of each of the Founding Fathers based on the Federalist Papers. Rose Kennedy told me that from childhood Jack was always a reader. He never could seem to get his fill of books. She said that Bobby never read when he was young, but when he began his appetite was so voracious that she couldn't stop him. But Jack had always been a student, and always been a great reader.

McHUGH: The reading of the Federalist Papers, was this something that their father would want them to do?

HALLE: Oh, this was part of their training. And I know that even from the very youngest period, the earliest part of knowing Joe Kennedy and his Rose, they always wanted the experts on everything for themselves and their children. Whatever it was, if it was a lawyer, or they were interested in some problem, Joe automatically went to the expert. And I find that, today, Bobby does this; and Jack, I mean, President Kennedy, did that, too. They were trained by their father to go to the best source available for anything they sought. Look for the best. Look for the person that was the most skilled and the most expert.

McHUGH: Did you have any contact with the President after he came back from his service in the Pacific?

HALLE: No, I didn't.

McHUGH: You didn't know him...

HALLE: I didn't see him much then. I found one thing about President Kennedy that I think is very important. I don't know whether it has been brought out very much. But when Jack Kennedy was a Congressman and in the early days as Senator, you did not see him much at parties in Washington—the big parties. Occasionally, you would see him at small groups. He

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never sat around listening to general conversation. He was always off in a corner with some Congressman, Senator, Ambassador or some expert in a certain field “improving each shining hour.” He'd have them cornered, and he'd sit there most of the evening until he was about to leave. I never saw him in general conversation, and very rarely at large parties. He really worked.

McHUGH: Do you think he was, well, shall we say a mixer? I think James MacGregor Burns said that he had doubts about his being much of a mixer.

HALLE: I think Jack Kennedy was a man of reserve. He was reserved. He wasn't shy, he was reserved. I always had a curious feeling about him that he had a sense of his own destiny in a curious way, that, perhaps, he was not going to have as long a time as he might wish to do all he wanted to do. There was some curious sense in him that every moment seemed keenly important and was not to be wasted.

McHUGH: You don't know why he had this feeling?

HALLE: No, but I just think.... I don't know why I had this feeling, but I sensed this about him. He had a—he was a serious person, but he had—humor. Of course, he was tremendously Irish. He was a great kidder. And I often felt that sometimes he'd get groups around. His father did the same thing. He'd suddenly just drop a depth charge of a remark, make some tremendously charged statement and watch and listen to the reactions .

McHUGH: You said he had this sense of destiny. Can you give any examples that you could think of that made you— why you felt that way?

HALLE: Well, no. It was more of a climate about him, nothing he said. Just something I felt about him. Perhaps it was a characteristic he inherited from his father who sometimes, in order to find out something, would make a startling statement. If you weren't alert to his kind of humor, or what he was thinking about, or what was behind it, you could take it seriously. I often noted people taking Joe Kennedy seriously when I knew he was experimenting with ideas. I often thought about

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it when President Kennedy suggested to his intimates at the White House that he was thinking of dropping Dean Rusk as Secretary of State. I often wondered if it might not have been to “get a reaction.” I can just see him doing what his father would have done just to take soundings from his advisers. “Now what do they really think of Dean Rusk? I'd like to hear something.” You see? Maybe it wasn't that he wanted to drop him. That wasn't necessarily his view but he wanted to get a kind of a consensus, or reaction. His father did this a great deal. He had an Irish kidding quality that he inherited from his father. And Bobby has it, too. Teddy, is the actor in the family. He could have made a fortune in the theatre.

McHUGH: And then you mentioned the incident of him being at the dance and...

HALLE: Well, President Kennedy had tremendous courage and style. I had the feeling that he was someone who had suffered a great deal physically and had simply dominated physical pain.

McHUGH: Why did you feel that?

HALLE: Well, I can remember one very rare occasion that I saw him at a dance at the Sulgrave Club. He was a Senator then. It was very shortly after his terribly serious back operation. And...

McHUGH: Was that the first operation?

HALLE: I think it was the second. I'm not sure which one, now. I could tell from the date but I know that he'd been seriously ill, and I think it was the very, very serious one, you know, when he was even given the Last Rites as he

seemed so mortally ill. At that party at the Sulgrave Club we were talking together. He was leaning against the back of a chair. Someone was sitting in the chair. It had a high back and he was leaning against the top of the back. I was facing him as we were talking together. We decided not to dance but to talk. Suddenly the girl who was sitting in the chair got up, which meant that Jack went down, slid and fell straight on the floor on the bottom of his spine. He turned white as a sheet, and I remember saying to him, "Look, Jack, take both of my hands,"—I have a

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brother-in-law, Doctor George Crile, Jr., who is a noted surgeon and I remember once hearing him or one of his colleagues say that if one ever falls and hits one's spine not to get up unevenly. So, I said, "Why don't you just lie there a minute." Fortunately, it was in a corner where he wasn't being observed. But he said, "No, no." So I said, "Well, all right." I was firm with him and said, "Take my two hands, and if you're going to get up, I'll pull you up evenly." He rose, righted himself and went right on talking to me. I knew that he must have been in desperate pain, but he just went straight on with the conversation. The understandable pallor was finally replaced by his normal ruddiness. I was absolutely staggered, because when he landed, I could hear his spine hit the floor. I thought that was the most remarkable demonstration of his iron courage and power to dominate the physical with his will.

McHUGH: When did you see him next after that?

HALLE: Oh, well, I saw him quite frequently. That was, of course, when he was Senator.

McHUGH: On what occasions would you see him?

HALLE: Well, I'd see him—there was one evening that we all went to dinner in Georgetown and four of us came back to my house for a nightcap before we parted. An artist friend of mine, Dan Rasmussen, had painted a mural in my dining room which Jack wanted to see as he'd heard about it. He went into the dining room, and after he looked at it his eye swung to a piece of furniture and he asked, "Where did you get that sideboard?" I said I had inherited it from my family. He then told me he had never seen a natural mahogany Adam table before. Then he got on his hands and knees and looked under the table. When I said, "What are you doing?" he said, "you can tell by the boards—the underside of a table what its age is. Whether it's a reproduction, or whether it's of the period." I did know you couldn't leave interesting or cherished books around or Jack would scoop them up and be off with them if they were on a subject he might be interested in. I hadn't realized that he knew anything about eighteenth century furniture. I asked him about his interest in furniture and he said, "Oh, well." He looked at me and smiled in that way he had. "It's a beautiful table." Then he looked around

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at everything. But that one object, the table, seemed to be the only thing that really caught him. The night after Jack Kennedy's Inaugural, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and Ken Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] came to my house, on their way to see some play. Ken described how he had been wakened by the President at five or six the morning following the Inaugural. They'd all gotten in at about three from the ball. Ken said that the President asked him to come over and talk about the balance of payments and take breakfast with him. After breakfast while they were discussing the international economics the President said, "Now, we're going to go straight through this house. I've never seen anything but the State rooms in the White House. I want to see everything, the closets, the pantries—everything." Ken said that as they went through each room the President would look at one piece of furniture after the other and say, "Ken, look at this, it's not even authentic. It's not even a good reproduction. I hope to make this house the repository of the best in the decorative arts of America." And I've always had the feeling that he probably went upstairs that night and said to Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy Onassis], "You've got great taste. I know the job for you." We all know that anybody around a Kennedy had to be doing something so he probably said, "Jackie, get your experts and a committee together and help make the White House a living example of the best in America." I feel the President had something like this in mind. Nobody could have been more suited to carry it out than Jackie, as we've seen. I think it's an interesting point because, I think Jack knew an enormous amount about the history of furniture, both French and.... I know he told me that he personally favored heavy Chippendale.

McHUGH: That is interesting. Also you were involved in the Inaugural to some extent. You were asked to invite the artists to attend.

HALLE: Yes, I was on the Inaugural Committee and as I listened to the plans at one meeting, which seemed so pedestrian, but the inevitable logistics of a convention, I thought of the President having selected Robert Frost to speak at the Inaugural. As I listened to these feeble ideas for entertaining various visiting governors' wives and governors, I asked Stanley Woodward, the head of our Committee, whether they had any plans to bring the eminent people in the arts, sciences, and humanities as special guests of the President to the inaugural. There was a dead silence

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around the table. Stanley, bless his heart, said, "Well, it's never happened before at any Inaugural, but I don't see why we shouldn't think about this. You take it and see what you can do." I was turned down by the Democratic National Committee, saying, "Where would we billet the people if we got them to Washington as it was only five weeks before the Inaugural. So I had to process the whole project. I got two or three people, and a secretary and we just did it on our own. I used the criteria of award winners of some sort, so it wouldn't look as though I were setting up the criteria for what the Democrats felt was eminent or not in the arts, sciences, and humanities. Of course, the minute it was suggested to Jack Kennedy, the concept delighted him and he assigned Fred Holborn [Frederick L.

Holborn] in his office to work with me on it. There were about 196 on the list. As it was only five weeks before the Inauguration we thought not more than 30 or so would accept. Actually over 100 accepted, so we had to find lodgings for those who couldn't stay with friends. I asked all of them when they came to the Inaugural to write in a special book some message for President and Mrs. Kennedy, because I told them they wouldn't be able to meet the President, but I knew he would want to know they had come. And each one of them gave me a little photograph of him or herself—an informal photograph, and each inscribed some message in the book which I put on my table here. They all came to my house to collect their credentials. Weeks after the Inaugural I kept getting messages from the White House, from President Kennedy, asking, "Where is that book? I want to see that book." Finally, months later, as some were late in sending pictures and others who couldn't come wanted to write something for the book, the day came when President Kennedy invited me to come in and bring it to him! I had put little markers in places where I thought he'd be particularly interested. Ernest Hemingway [Ernest Miller Hemingway] wrote a beautiful inscription as did E. B. White and Archie MacLeish [Archibald MacLeish]. The President took the book and sat in his chair with such youthful agility. I kept thinking if anybody was in any doubt of whether his back was well or not they should have seen him. I even had the impression he was wearing tennis shoes, but of course he was not. He sat in his chair with his two feet up on the desk. And later, I think it was Mac Bundy [MacGeorge Bundy] said, "Oh, yes that's what we always called bivouacking in his chair." The President took the book and went through every single page reading everything. I thought, he must be skimming it and said, "Mr. President, you couldn't be reading it all through." Then he said, "Test me." Of course, I'd

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forgotten he had learned speed reading. But he stopped, and—I felt this was very, very touching and beautiful—he stopped at the inscription that Ernest Hemingway had written and read it aloud, "We thought any President who could brave the cold, (of the Inaugural) could stand the heat to come. Watching on television, we thought how beautiful Mrs. Kennedy looked." Then the President turned to me and said, "Kay, you have no idea what a help Jackie is to me, and what she has meant to me." And then he said, "Didn't she look beautiful?" Then I said to him, "You know, Mr. President, you've singled out Ernest Hemingway's tribute. Of all the people that I asked to write in this book, he was the one that was the most troubled. He kept calling me from Mayo Clinic where he was hospitalized being treated for high blood pressure, but, of course, for depression as well—and he kept asking what he should write. And I read him a few excerpts from the book, aware of his state of mind." Then I then said to the President, "You know, I was terribly tempted to call you and suggest that you might put in a call to Hemingway to buck him up." I remember the President's reply, "Kay, you know, that sometimes perhaps it's better not to try and play God." I thought it quite wonderful, and realistic of him. But, anyway, we went through all of these tributes. He chuckled, particularly at a lovely informal snap shot of Dean Pound [Roscoe Pound] of the Harvard Law School, lunching with a big white napkin, slap over his big fat belly. The President laughed a lot at that. He just loved that one. At the end of our meeting he asked me, "What have you got on your mind?" I realized we had talked far too

long as Dave Powers [David F. Powers] kept coming in at intervals to say that Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and Bernie Baruch [Bernard M. Baruch] were waiting to see him, along with one or two others. President Kennedy said, “Tell them to wait. I’m looking at something that interests me, and just tell them to wait. Don’t get excited.” Then he continued with me, “Have you anything particularly on your mind?” I said, I had indeed on my mind that it was about time we made Churchill an honorary citizen.

McHUGH: Was that right at the beginning of his...

HALLE: Yes. I told him. I said, you know, I tried to put this idea through during President Eisenhower’s [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration but Churchill indicated that he felt, quite rightly, that it was probably not the time after the Suez crisis. But I said, I hoped it would be something that he,

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President Kennedy, would be proud to bring about in his Administration. His eyes shone as he said, “Of course, you know, Kay, I made a speech in the Senate after hearing Eric Sevareid’s CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] News report of your suggestion. It’s exactly what I’m for and I’m going to set my team on it.” And I told him also that I thought that he ought to appoint more leading women to government posts, because they were eager to work for him. Then he said, “What have you got there?” pointing to two pieces of paper I had brought with me. He didn’t miss anything. One was a quote from Winston Churchill’s The River War. It fitted uncannily into the then current Congo mess and had been written by Churchill, sixty—well, it was sixty-two years before and concerned all the tribes that the British Empire were fighting in Africa. The President looked at me amazed and said, “I just don’t believe it. Because,” he said, “there was a potentate that was mentioned in that very passage from The River War, about one of the leaders of one of the tribes called the Akhund of Swat and,” he continued, “You know, when Ayub [Mohammad Ayub Khan] was here, two weeks ago, on a state visit from Pakistan, he told me he was descended from the Akhund of Swat. I remembered this very passage but I didn’t remember what it came from. So I had my research people look for it. Nobody could find it, nobody knew where it came from.” And he said, “You walk in this office with the very passage I’ve been looking for.”

McHUGH: Do you know how he had come by his interest in Churchill? He seemed to have read quite a bit of him?

HALLE: I think it’s just because he loved history. He told me, I remember, that he had read every single thing Churchill had ever written. I believe he had read Churchill even in Hansard, which is Britain’s Congressional Record.

McHUGH: Is that so?

HALLE: Yes, you remember, I saw him reading The World Crisis when he was a young boy in the hospital. Oh yes, he had a great feeling for—he'd studied all the great political leaders.

McHUGH: Some people said he had a predilection for things English. Do you think that was so, particularly?

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HALLE: I think he had style, you see. He had an innate style himself, and I think he would normally have felt this very strongly. Oh yes, he was very drawn to the English, very drawn to the English.

McHUGH: In spite of his Irish extraction? This didn't seem to present any conflict?

HALLE I think Jack Kennedy was one of those very rare persons who are above the battle. He was a very exceptional person. There were all sorts of reserves in him, profound reserves, I feel. There were a great many things nobody knew about him, that he didn't share. I feel sure there were a great number of things that he didn't share with anybody.

McHUGH: Burns, in his portrait, also makes the point, or says that because of his detachment he felt that there was sometimes a lack of a sense of commitment, and of passion that would carry him through a great crisis. Can you comment on that?

HALLE: Well, I think he liked intellectual dialogue. I always think of Jack Kennedy in the context of the gymnasium of the Golden Greek period. I don't think he would have enjoyed the rough and tumble of wooing and winning legislators to his side, in the same way that President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] does. I think President Johnson has an appetite for the arena. I think that Jack Kennedy was much more of a man in the—he liked the intellectual exercise of discussion. I think he was an activist up to a point, but I think it's true that, what he often said, that he would have liked to have been a teacher. I think that if there was anything he really felt strongly, that he wanted to do, it was to teach. But he had to take little Joe's place, in the political goals Father Joe had set for his family. He wanted his sons trained to serve their country in the British tradition. This is what's so fascinating and strange, that the stamp of British tradition among the advantaged classes in England should have imprinted itself upon an Irishman, and such an Irishman as Joe. This is a curious paradox. I think there are paradoxes in the whole family, except for the girls. I think the girls are really very typically Irish.

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McHUGH: Well, I think I agree with you, there certainly are these paradoxes.

HALLE: This is what, of course, makes them interesting.

McHUGH: But do you think he lacked a sense of commitment to...

HALLE: No. No, I don't think that. I think it's awfully difficult to tell what his Administration might have achieved had he been able to serve twice, which he certainly would have, I'm sure, if he had lived. It's hard to tell how it would have gone, but I think he could have conceivably gone into a second period after he had laid down the lines of the New Frontier philosophy. I think we might have been surprised to see the wells within him erupt into putting his philosophies to work.

McHUGH: During the time of his campaign Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] was in doubt about his commitment to liberalism, as one issue...

HALLE: Oh, well, I had a very interesting insight into that. I was working for the Presidency of Jack Kennedy, helping to organize and administer the Citizens for Kennedy drive in Cleveland.

McHUGH: Oh, did you? Oh, that's very interesting.

HALLE: Mrs. Roosevelt came to speak to us because a great many of the people I was counting on in the greater Cleveland area to vote for Jack had been passionate Stevensonites [Adlai E. Stevenson]. And it was very difficult to persuade them over. So I felt that if we could get Mrs. Roosevelt to come and declare for Jack Kennedy and believe in him, it would be a wise thing to do. She was to be in Cleveland for some talks. So she was invited to join our breakfast meeting with the Citizens for Kennedy staff. I will never forget her most telling story which won over any doubters. She said that at one point during the campaign one of her granddaughters, who had been very close to her, was killed falling off a horse. Prior to this tragedy Jack Kennedy had made an appointment to visit her, to tell her the reasons for his running, and what he believed as he knew how important it was to have her

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with him. Their appointment to meet fell a day or two after the death of this beloved grandchild, who lived with Mrs. Roosevelt and had been so very close to her. Mrs. Roosevelt said she felt that Jack's campaign schedule was so tightly arranged she couldn't put him off. So she asked him to go ahead with his plan to visit her at Hyde Park. She then told us, "That young man behaved with such sensitivity and compassion throughout that whole day, he gave me more comfort than almost anyone around me, my family or anybody else. The manner in which he treated me during the day of his visit won me as did the many things he told me he believed in and what he wanted to do." My Cleveland doubters were thereafter won to Jack Kennedy as the next President.

McHUGH: Is that so?

HALLE: Yes. And that was a very good example of his tender side that I don't think too many people would have known about.

McHUGH: I think that's very interesting. Was this related to you by Mrs. Roosevelt?

HALLE: Oh, she told us this at our breakfast meeting and how thoroughly he had convinced her, dispelling any doubts she might have had about his character.

McHUGH: Can you enlarge any on your work with the Citizens for Kennedy that you organized?

HALLE: Oh, that was a wonderful office in Cleveland because we introduced an innovation. To begin with, in Cleveland, the papers were very Republican, so I felt that—since they were not carrying certain columns, such as Lippmann [Walter Lippmann], for one, just dropping them, I turned our headquarters into an information center. We were nearby the big Cleveland Trust and all the various banks. We had a huge plate glass front window. I simply used the whole front window to paste up the columns that people were being deprived of in our papers. We attracted crowds of people who stood reading what had been deleted from their newspapers. And then I had tables and chairs where the public could sit and read speeches of “What Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] says,” and “Kennedy says,” on every single issue. So if anyone wanted to come in and read and

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be informed, he could. I said, “Don't take our word for it. Read! Find out what each candidate has said,” And that was an innovation. We had men coming in, workmen, with their lunch pails sitting down to digest this material, asking questions, and becoming informed. We were there to answer questions and inform.

McHUGH: Surely. That sounds like a very good innovation. Where did you get the idea for doing this sort of thing? Had you had experience in this before?

HALLE: No. Probably because I hadn't. I hadn't actually been active before in a Presidential campaign so I wasn't caught up with a lot of boring stereotypes to break down. I just did it the way I thought it could be successful.

McHUGH: Were you able to determine what the effects of your group of Citizens for Kennedy was, or anything that you can think of that they...

HALLE: Well, they tell us that we were effective. I know we worried all the Establishment terribly. We had some marvelous discussions there. It was a—it was like an old fashioned town hall forum. We attracted lots of the young who had never thought of identifying with politics before. Whizzer White [Byron R. White], Supreme Court Justice, who headed National Citizens for Kennedy, came through, and after inspecting our Cleveland Headquarters he told me, “This is exactly what Jack Kennedy would like.” We even impressed Adam Clayton Powell [Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.], who came in. I briefed him on important points to make in speeches he was to give around the area.

McHUGH: Oh, is that so? He was campaigning in that area too?

HALLE: Oh, yes.

McHUGH: Is that right?

HALLE: Oh, yes.

McHUGH: What was your impression of him at that time?

HALLE: Well, I found him a very attractive man, very colorful, like an oriental pasha. But he was very intelligent. He told me that he didn’t use the old banal arguments

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that everybody was using. “What do we do?” I said, “Well, I think one thing you should remember that the accusation of Kennedy’s being a Catholic is madness to use with our Latin American neighbors to the South. And so many of the people that come from that part of the country being part of our constituents, I think this ought to be pointed out.” He immediately landed on it, and turned his speeches on this point. He was successful because it was truth.

McHUGH: Did you have an intimation of how Kennedy felt himself about the introduction of the religious issue in the campaign?

HALLE: You know, I’m trying to remember one time where he said something about it. “I wish we could start a new religion that would bring all people together,” he said. Let me say this, I think he was a spiritual man. I don’t think he believed in dogma. This would be my.... He was very much, I think, like Churchill in this respect. Churchill was asked if he thought of himself as a pillar of the Church. “No,” he said, “more like one of the flying buttresses. I support it from the outside.” I think he was loyal, to the Catholic Church. I think, of course, the way he expressed himself—in Houston, in the Rice Hotel, when he made that great statement on his religious views was deeply authentic. I think this was what he really profoundly believed.

McHUGH: And it was at this time that he made this statement on having this one religion that brought all people...

HALLE: No, I can some way remember a discussion about religion, and his saying something about it. I may find that in my notes somewhere because I remember being impressed by it and putting it down somewhere.

McHUGH: How was it received in the discussion, do you recall?

HALLE: Well, it seemed so inevitable, what he said.

McHUGH: This was not at his house, I presume?

HALLE: No, I don't remember now exactly where this was. But it was a speculation on the role religion was taking today, you know, and how religion in some ways had caused so

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many wars and aggression and all the things that one decries. And...

McHUGH: You said he was a spiritual man. Did you mean he was a religious person, or how did you mean that?

HALLE: No, I think it's more—I just don't know how much dogma in religion meant to him, because I don't think he discussed it much. I feel he would have agreed with Disraeli [Benjamin Disraeli], I believe it was, who said, "My religion is the religion of all wise men. Wise men never tell." You don't talk about religion, you know, it was more like that with President Kennedy.

McHUGH: So you don't recall any other instance where he ever referred to it as far as the campaign went?

HALLE: No. Oh, no.

McHUGH: Other than that?

HALLE: No.

McHUGH: When did you see him again after the Inauguration? When next did you have contact with him? You presented him with the...

HALLE: Well, I saw him, of course, when he had all of the eminent people at that Pablo Casals Dinner at the White House—a memorable evening.

McHUGH: Were you involved in that?

HALLE: Yes, I was there. And the thing that was so interesting, which is what I think he loved about that evening, was that it was one of the first times that so many of these great people in the arts, sciences, and humanities, had ever had a chance to meet each other. I observed them going down the receiving line and even though they were being greeted by the most attractive young President and his wife that had ever graced the White House, suddenly, in the middle of the receiving line a Nobel scientist

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would say, “Is that really Stokowski [Leopold Stokowski]?” All this tremendous intermingling of these extraordinary people gathered together to greet him caused the President to light up with undisguised pleasure.

McHUGH: Did you have any sense, at this time, of whether he was feeling the pressures of the Presidency or....

HALLE: No, I never felt that. I really never felt that in the whole time that—the few times that I saw him after he was President.

McHUGH: Did you notice any change in his health that was observable?

HALLE: No. No, I never did. I mean, other than what generally, the public would notice, you know, puffiness from cortisone. I think he had a very changeable kind of a face, anyway. I mean he could change from day to day, you know.

McHUGH: How did you mean the cortisone showed?

HALLE: Anyone that takes cortisone, you know, changing dosage causes some change in the face. Even though he was on very, very little I think in the beginning you could see something that he had a...

McHUGH: Coppery skin or something like that?

HALLE: Not so much that, as his—just a fullness of the face.

McHUGH: Oh, yes, I understand. Do you recall the next occasion you saw him?

HALLE: No, I'm just trying to think. Oh, yes, of course, I do. Sir Winston's son, Randolph Churchill [Randolph S. Churchill], was staying with me. Oh, yes, I do remember this very, very vividly. I remember Randolph one morning waking up with a foreboding foresight of things ahead, a characteristic he shared with his father. He said, “I feel there's something wrong with Macmillan [M. Harold

Macmillan].” So I said, “Well, Randolph, there’s only one thing to do, telephone London, and find out.” He finally called several people, but

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couldn’t reach them. Then he called Julian Amery. The Conservatives were all at Blackpool at a big party conference. Randolph finally reached Julian, Macmillan’s son-in-law, who was then Colonial Secretary. Randolph asked how everything was going. And he was informed by Julian that Macmillan, after a two hour Cabinet meeting was in desperate pain, and had been taken to the hospital, and was to be operated on for, I think it was a prostate operation. Within twenty-four hours he was going to resign as Prime Minister though this news was secret. I urged Randolph to tell the President as the British and American government leaders were so close.

McHUGH: I’ve got to reverse this.

BEGIN SIDE II OF TAPE I

HALLE: So I said, “Randolph, I think it’s your duty to call the President.” But Randolph said he’d been told that he must absolutely keep this a dead secret. I said, “Well, there are no secrets between your government and our government, and I think it’s only fair for you to tell the President.” So he thought it over and agreed that I was probably right. And I said, “It’s clearly something that I would very much doubt if even Ambassador Bruce [David K.E. Bruce] knows yet.” So I called Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] on the telephone and said, “I don’t want to bother the President but Randolph Churchill who is staying with me is in possession of some information that I, believe the President should know.” She asked me to wait a minute. She came back and said to put Randolph on the line. So Randolph went to the telephone and asked me to get on another telephone, and listen, and “see if you think this is...” He said, “Mr. President,” and then told him what had happened. I thought it was remarkable the way the President received this news, because he never revealed whether he knew it or not, and said, “Thank you very much Randolph. You know my feeling for the British. I am related through my sister Kathleen [Kathleen Kennedy Cavendish] to a family of which Macmillan is a member. I have a most tremendous regard for your country, and I feel very, very close, and I’m honored to think that you have taken the trouble to tell me this news. Thank you very much, Randolph, I’d like to see you tomorrow. Will you and Kay come around? I’d like to see you.” Then he hung up. Randolph, thought he had done the right thing. That night I went to the French Embassy for dinner

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and arrived very late, because I had had to cook dinner for Randolph first. Secretary McNamara and Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] came in, and were placed at the table next to mine. I felt somebody tugging at my dress. It was Secretary McNamara saying, “It’s very clear that we ought to move Pentagon intelligence over to 3001 Dent

Place!” I showed surprise until he said, “We were in the office with the President when Randolph telephoned the news about Macmillan’s illness and impending resignation. None of us knew anything about it.” After our meeting with the President Randolph and I had been invited by Bobby and Ethel Kennedy [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] to go on the yacht the Honey Fitz down the Potomac that night with a small party. This was only a few months before the dread day of the assassination. Randolph went to the White House first to see the President. I waited in the Fish Room, while Randolph had a few words with the President first, when suddenly the door opened. I had fallen asleep and suddenly I heard somebody calling my name. I opened my eyes and as if in a dream through two doors that were open from the Fish Room, I saw the President sitting at his desk calling to me to come in! I went in, and suddenly saw a strange movement under the President’s desk. Then the door of his knee-hole desk opened and out popped a little head. It was little John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.]. He held out pieces of gum and paper that he was trying to give me. The President leaned over and said to him, “I’m a great big wolf and I’m going to eat you up in one big bite.” At which little John laughed his head off. Then Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] came in, and the President said, “You know, I’ve been taking care of the children because Jackie, (I think on a cruise in the Greek islands) is away and I’m having the most marvelous time taking care of the children.” Then, as I had interrupted the conversation, Randolph asked the President, “How would you like to have that little blank Harold Wilson to deal with as Prime Minister?” The President looked up from papers he was signing and said, “Randolph, this Government could work with anybody the British voted in as Prime Minister.” Then he looked at me and I could see he was tired and I suggested we leave. The President rose saying that his father had come that night to visit him and he wanted to go up and spend some of the evening with him. Winking at me, he added, “Randolph, you are going to be late if you don’t hurry to get down to the boat. Perhaps I’ll see you later.” I felt that he was truly grateful that I was closing the interview. It was to be the last time I was to see him. After boarding the Honey Fitz we had dinner, buffet fashion with plates on our laps when the telephone rang and a Filipino waiter on the boat came with a telephone

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on a silver salver and handed it to me saying it was for Teddy Kennedy. Teddy was in the middle of a marvelous story mimicking a speech that had been made in behalf of his brother, in the campaign—Teddy is a tremendous actor. As he was in the middle of “the speech” and everybody was roaring with laughter at his authentic accent and language, it was obvious he couldn’t answer the telephone. So I suggested that Randolph, sitting next to me, pick up the call for Teddy as the little Filipino was confused as he was also balancing a tray of food in one hand. “It’s the President on the telephone,” said the waiter. Randolph thinking it a joke picked up the receiver and after hearing that it was the President said in a loud voice, “It is the President.” So he turned the telephone over to me, and I heard him say, “I thought I could make it, but I can’t.” He had hoped to join us on the boat. And that was the last word I ever heard from him. That was the last sentence, the last time I heard his voice.

McHUGH: Are there any other incidents of the family that you recall?

HALLE: Well, the worst thing, although I know I did the right thing, concerns an episode that Mrs. Dixon [Jeane Dixon] describes in the beginning of her book, The Gift of Prophecy. I was having lunch in June of the year the President was murdered with Mrs. Alice Roosevelt Longworth, at my house and the doorbell rang. We were in the middle of lunch. My maid, Susan, came to me and announced that there was a woman in the drawing room that said she simply had to see me, that she'd be willing to wait, but she had to see me. I left the table to see what it was all about. It was Mrs. Dixon, whom I only met fleetingly twice before. She said, "You're the only person I know who knows the President, and you've got to tell him that he must not go to Dallas. If he goes it's going to be fatal." "Well, if it's predestined," I said, "why do you tell me such a thing." There must be many, many such messages that come in to the White House from clairvoyant people all over the world and who could sort them out. Secondly, I said, "President Kennedy is a very brave man who wouldn't listen to this kind of thing. If anything, it would challenge him to go there. There isn't anything I can do," I said, "I can't do it. I can't do it." And I added, "I hope the President thinks of me as a fairly sane person. He would

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question my sanity if I conveyed such a message to him." Later I did regret not having lodged this prescience with someone I knew on the White House staff just for possible scientific data.

McHUGH: She was quite specific?

HALLE: Oh, she was. . . . And then she kept telephoning me almost at the start of every month. Then in November she would call me practically every day and say, "The clouds are getting darker over the White House."

McHUGH: Well, how would she know? Did she mention Houston, specifically? How did she know that far ahead that he was going to Houston?

HALLE: She didn't. None of us knew. She didn't say Houston, she said Dallas.

McHUGH: Oh, I'm sorry.

HALLE: Oh, yes. Dallas. She was specific.

McHUGH: Is that so? Well, that's certainly curious.

HALLE: Yes. Well, it was a terrible burden on me. I asked her why she told this horror to me. She said, "I am impelled and compelled to tell you this." So, as it was so impossible for me to conceive of the idea I suppose I didn't accept it. I rejected it because I didn't believe it.

McHUGH: How long before was it when she first told you about her foreboding?
How many months?

HALLE: Well, I'd say it was in May or June. I could find it in my notes—I know I wrote it down. And, of course, after Mrs. Dixon's visit and her "vision" as she called it, I went right straight back in and told Mrs. Dixon's warning to Mrs. Longworth. Ironically, it was Mrs. Longworth who announced to me what had happened while I was having lunch with Lady West, an English friend of mine, the day of the assassination. Mrs.

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Longworth telephoned and said, "What you were told, has happened." I've never spoken about all this, of course, to Bobby or Teddy. But I did speak about it to Janet Auchincloss [Janet Lee Auchincloss], Jackie Kennedy's mother. She calmed my conscience by saying, "You did absolutely the right thing. Nobody would have believed, or would have accepted it." But certainly Adlai Stevenson was warned, as others were, that Texas was a difficult state to go into.

McHUGH: Yes, yes, I think that was true. Well, if you have no other observation you'd like to make, Miss Halle, I guess we can terminate it here.

HALLE: Yes. I should have looked over some of my notes and papers before this, but if I do find anything I do think would be of any value, I can just call you.

McHUGH: Surely.

HALLE: At the Archives?

McHUGH: Yes.

HALLE: Are you in Evelyn Lincoln's office?

McHUGH: Well, we were in the office next door to Evelyn Lincoln's office. Now we're down on the third floor. But if you call, just ask for the Oral History Project.

HALLE: The Oral History Project.

McHUGH: Yes. Well, thank you very much, Miss Halle. Go ahead.

HALLE: Well there are three people who have told me stories about Jack Kennedy that might be worth recording. There's a Negro called Albert Jackson, who is one of the real aristocrats of Georgetown. His family and brother

have lived in Georgetown for four generations, two blocks away from me, and about two doors away from the Dean Achesons' [Dean G. Acheson] and not far from President Kennedy's residence when he was a Senator. One day

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Albert was acting as a waiter at my house for a dinner party. I asked him who were his favorites to work for. He said he always loved to go to Senator Kennedy's house, because he always had such fun there. He said, you know, after dinner, sometimes Mr. Kennedy would come into the kitchen and say, "Well, Albert, what do you think of those guests in there?" Just like his father. "Tell me what do you think of them. Which ones did you notice?" Then he used to ask Albert to come in and play and sing the guitar to his guests. Of course, Albert loved that. And I said to him one time, "It's always interesting to know what people like to drink." Albert said, "Oh," he said, "The President only really likes two drinks: Daiquiris and Dom Perignon champagne."

There is another man in town, a Mr. Durkay, who has a dry cleaning company. He came in to me right after the murder and said that he felt terribly because he had known the President when he was a Congressman. He and another friend of his, and Mr. Durkay used sometimes to go and have a beer, at some beer place. Mr. Durkay then spoke of the President's thoughtfulness. "I didn't have a car, so when Mr. Kennedy would go away on weekends he used to lend his car to me."

The third story, which I always felt was one of the most moving, happened on an occasion soon after the President's funeral when I took someone who had given a very fine piece of Lowestoft to see it in the Green Room at the White House. The donor was Robert Gries [Robert Hayes Gries] who happened to be in Washington on one of his very rare trips. It was about two weeks after the state funeral. The East Room was still draped in mourning, but it was the first tour, though a private one, to go through. It was arranged because of the generosity of this gentleman. We were conducted through the State Rooms by a Secret Service man who was quite young. Before we began the tour, in the Diplomatic Corridor, where you're received as you come into the White House, he told us that he couldn't take us on this tour without recounting something of his own personal experiences with President Kennedy. Then he told of the winter, a year ago, when he was on duty outside the Oval Room, the President's office. One terribly cold and bitter night he was guarding the President outside and President Kennedy came to the French doors, opened them and walked out saying, "I don't want you out there in this terrible cold. Come in here and get warm." The Secret Service guard then recounted how he told the President that it was his beat to remain outside and he must stay there and could not come in. He saw him return to his desk and go

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on signing papers. About ten minutes later the President reappeared at the French doors coatless himself but carrying a fleece-lined coat, saying, "I want you to put this on, you're not warm enough, I can tell." So to appease the President the guard put on the coat. In about ten minutes, he told us the President reappeared at the door with a cup of hot chocolate, for the two of them. He opened the French doors and sat down on the icy steps, coatless while he

and the guard drank hot chocolate together. The guard closed this touching incident saying "That's the kind of a President I've been serving." Thereupon his voice broke and he wept unashamedly.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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