

William F. Kelly Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 06/01/1964
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Biographical Note

Kelly, Massachusetts political figure, district secretary for East Boston during John F. Kennedy's first congressional campaign (1946) and Senate campaign (1952), discusses his personal memories of JFK and campaigning in East Boston, among other issues.

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William F. Kelly – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM F. KELLY

June 1, 1964
Boston, Massachusetts

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: Bill, your connection with the late President had its roots away back in the time of Honey Fitz [John Francis Fitzgerald].

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: Can you tell us the circumstances of your associations with the late John F. Fitzgerald, and how that friendship began?

KELLY: Yes, I can Ed. My family and the Fitzgeralds were neighbors in the North End of Boston [Boston, Massachusetts], and took an active part in all of Mr. Fitzgerald's campaigns for mayor of Boston, Congressman, and the campaign against Henry Cabot Lodge for United States Senate.

MARTIN: What do you mean, took an active part? Were they actually out working for him?

KELLY: Yes. They worked for him in all the campaigns. In fact I had a younger brother who made a speech for him, when he was seven years of age, at the old

Jefferson Club at the corner of Hanover and Charter Streets in Boston.

MARTIN: Well, how well do you remember Honey Fitz?

KELLY: Very well. I remember Honey Fitz very well. I was around fourteen or fifteen years of age, when he was Mayor of Boston, and very active in the North End.

MARTIN: Well, actually you were over in East Boston at the time.

KELLY: No, we didn't get over to East Boston until 1919.

MARTIN: Oh, I see.

KELLY: We were old North Enders. My family was there for years. In fact they lived right next door to the Fitzgeralds on Garden Court Street in Boston.

MARTIN: Do you remember the late President's mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] when she was a schoolgirl?

KELLY: Well, not too well. I don't remember her. She was away at school most of the time. But the ones I remember distinctly are John F. Fitzgerald and his wife.

MARTIN: You know in that era there were....and your memory goes back quite a way. Do you remember Honey Fitz singing "Sweet Adeline"?

KELLY: Oh, very much so. We used to have a memorial mass at the different churches, St. Stephen's and St. Mary's in the North End, every year for the old heroes and Honey Fitz never failed to show up. And one of the principal points of that affair would be the singing of "Sweet Adeline."

MARTIN: At the church?

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KELLY: At the church. We'd adjourn from the church and we'd have a meeting in the school hall. He would be chairman every year and the gathering would wind up with the singing of "Sweet Adeline." It sure went over pretty good.

MARTIN: Then of course as you go along...you said you later moved to East Boston. Were you living in East Boston when you first met Jack Kennedy?

KELLY: Yes, I was. I was living in East Boston at the time. I was employed by the City of Boston. But let's go back. I first met Jack Kennedy with his brother, Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.], at the BAA [Boston Athletic Association] Clubhouse on Exeter Street on April 19, 1935. That was the year my cousin, the oldest, won the marathon race for the first time. Jack and Joe were with their grandfather to see the finish of the race along with a number of other old North Enders. Do you want me to go on now?

MARTIN: Sure.

KELLY: The next time I met Jack was when he became a candidate for Congress in the Eleventh Congressional District, the same district represented by his grandfather, John F. Fitzgerald. I sat in on a conference with all the men of the district and plans were formulated to start the campaign. Living in East Boston I was requested to act as Secretary of the East Boston area. The primaries of that year were held in June and eleven candidates had announced their intention of running for this office. It looked like a hard fight. Some outstanding politicians of the district became candidates; among them being Mike Neville [Michael J. Neville] of Cambridge [Cambridge, Massachusetts]; Johnnie Cotter [John F. Cotter] of Charlestown; Joe Russo [Joseph Russo] from the West End; Catherine Falvey of Boston; and Joe Lee of Boston. In East Boston we set up a campaign committee and planned a door-to-door campaign. This was carried on during the day time by the women of the district. Jack's sisters, Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] and Patricia [Patricia Kennedy Lawford], worked hand-in-hand with women in the different parts of the East Boston area. House parties were arranged for Jack and these were attended by Pat, Eunice, and

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Jack. A telephone campaign was also carried on and a very serious effort was made to contact all the old-timers in East Boston. The women's committee had been headed by my wife, Mrs. Mary Kelly. The re-election campaigns were a matter of course.

MARTIN: Let me stop you there for a second, Bill. Tell me a little bit more about these house parties. How would you set them up? Would you get on the phone and call various people?

KELLY: Well, the women handled the house parties mostly, but the way it was arranged: They would set up, say six or nine parties for an evening and with the assistance of Eunice, Pat, and Jack, we'd start off at one location. We'd drop either Pat or Eunice off at one location, go to the next one and drop another one off, and probably drop Jack off at the third one. We would then backtrack to the

first one and pick up the first one we dropped off and carry it on through the entire night and probably conducted nine to twelve house parties.

MARTIN: Nine of twelve house parties?

KELLY: In an evening, yes. And at some of the house parties we'd show a film or we'd have entertainment and they were attended by, all the way from twenty-five to seventy-five people.

MARTIN: What kind of film would you show?

KELLY: Well, we had various films. There were films on Jack; there were films on news events and stuff like that, and it proved very interesting. Then at the conclusion of the house parties the girls, Eunice and Pat, would circulate through the gathering and make themselves known and shake hands with people, and would remain until the party was over, until we came to pick them up.

MARTIN: Did you distribute any literature?

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KELLY: Oh, yes, hundreds and thousands of pieces of literature.

MARTIN: Pamphlets and brochures and things like that?

KELLY: Yes.

MARTIN: What did they serve, Bill? Was it coffee?

KELLY: We had sandwiches and coffee, and cake and ice cream.

MARTIN: I'm interested because this appears to be the beginning of what was known as the famous "Coffee with the Kennedys".

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: That's the thing that went on to the '52 Senate fight.

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: Also, another thing that intrigues me is this. You said you were the Secretary in East Boston. Was your official title "Secretary"?

KELLY: That's what they called the men handling the districts. Instead of managers or signifying them as ward leaders and stuff like that. We weren't connected with any politicians; we were all amateurs. And the dubbed us with the title of Secretary, and that's what we were known as.

MARTIN: Bill, tell me a little bit about East Boston at that time. This was about 1946; the War was just ending; there were lots of veterans returning. What was it, mostly Italian? Was it a mixture of Irish and Italians?

KELLY: Well, the ward at the time, in my opinion, was predominantly Italian. The Italians were in the

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majority and I think the Kennedy family felt that probably Joe Russo would carry the district in East Boston, and they were very fearful of that. In fact with Cotter in Charlestown, Neville in Cambridge, it was quite an item in East Boston to see if we couldn't keep the Italian vote in line. So in order to do that we recruited some of the older Italian people in the town who had known the Kennedy family, knew Joe and knew old Mr. Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] himself. And we made a concerted drive particularly down the lower end of East Boston, to enroll the Italian vote and as a result it proved that Jack did get the majority of the Italian vote in the town.

MARTIN: When you say the lower end, you mean down around Maverick Square?

KELLY: That's right. Actually, from Day Square down.

MARTIN: Yes. Now also part of the campaign, East Boston leaned heavily on Jack's war record, and didn't they have a distribution of a *Reader's Digest* article?

KELLY: That's true. We sent out in East Boston at that time approximately fifteen thousand copies of that article in the *Reader's Digest* relating to the PT Boat incident, and it went over very big. And it was quite a proposition to get it in the mails and get it delivered. I might bring this point out and give it a little credit to the East Boston Post Office. We had—the primaries were coming on the 17th of June, or the 16th or 18th, I am not sure which, but the day was a holiday in Suffolk County, the 17th of June, and there was no delivery in the district at that particular time of second or third class mail and it was a problem of distribution. I went to the Superintendent of the East Boston Post Office and told him my problem, and I told him we wouldn't have finished until sometime Sunday. He asked me when we got them finished if I wouldn't take them over to the South Postal Station on Sunday afternoon no later than five o'clock and he would see that when they were delivered to him on Monday morning at six o'clock that they would be distributed that day within the district. And giving them credit,

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that was what was done. And the fifteen thousand circulars on PT were distributed on the day before primary day that year.

MARTIN: That's amazing! Bill, also I am interested in the structure of the organization over in that district. After you were named Secretary, how did you get these people? Did you personally go out?

KELLY: Through personal contact.

MARTIN: Did you open up a headquarters?

KELLY: That's right. We opened up headquarters down in Maverick Square, and I enlisted the assistance of about ten women and about ten men and they circulated through the district, and when it became known that Jack was a candidate, and we were looking for volunteers, we didn't have too much trouble. People came and offered their services, and were willing to work nights and Sundays and any time we wanted them. And in fact I might say this, there wasn't a night went by that we were carrying on the campaign and getting out materials, correspondence, and so forth and so on, that we didn't have at least twenty-five to fifty women and men volunteers at our headquarters in Maverick Square. We had a complete floor over Iver's lunch. It's an old building and we had three distinct and separate offices, and we had tables and chairs and everything in there and we went right to town.

MARTIN: Well now, how about the candidate himself? How often did he come over?

KELLY: Oh, we saw the candidate probably every night, if he could make it. If not, every other night. And he'd make a call sometime during the day or evening.

MARTIN: Bill, can you recall why the primary was in June? Was it a question of absentee ballots or something?

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KELLY: It was a question of absentee ballots I think, and I think it was a question of the fellows coming back from the service.

MARTIN: Yes.

KELLY: And there was something about September that I don't recall distinctly, but it was moved up and I think it proved a very good omen.

MARTIN: How about the vote over there?

KELLY: The vote at that particular time, I think we had about twenty thousand voters in the ward and I think there was around between eleven and twelve thousand votes cast. I think Jack carried the town by about a thousand or twelve hundred and that helped very much to put him over.

MARTIN: Bill, during the course of the first congressional campaign was there any unusual incident that showed the character of the candidate? Can you recall any?

KELLY: Yes, Ed. I think there was one incident that stood out very, very strongly in the campaign. We used to have meetings with Jack at 18 Tremont Street, the Kimball Building, in reference to how the campaign was progressing, and at one of the meetings one of the men suggested that we bring out the war service of Johnnie Cotter. Johnnie had served in the Army [United States Army] and...

MARTIN: He was one of the candidates?

KELLY: He was one of the candidates? He was secretary to Congressman Higgins [John P. Higgins], and when Higgins became Judge of the Superior Court, Cotter acted as Congressman, and he ran for the office when Higgins resigned. Cotter was assigned to the recruiting of WACs [Women's Army Corps] in the Boston area. And one of the men suggested that we publicize this fact on Cotter, which I didn't agree with and Jack reared up and stated that if that was the way he was to win the content he wanted no

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part of it. No man's service or character would have any attack made on it during any part of the campaign.

MARTIN: That's interesting. You mentioned earlier that his re-election of course became just a matter of routine. Now moving up into the 1952 fight when he first decided to go for Senate and take upon himself, not only the Lodge family, but also a state wide campaign. Bill, did you think at the time that he had a shot at that?

KELLY: Yes, I think he had a grand chance to win because he had made such an impression on the district. It went state wide, and it proved that the man had a lot on the ball, and the moment he mentioned his candidacy for the Senate, people just flocked to you and wanted to know what they could do. And I think that situation developed throughout the entire state.

MARTIN: Would you have preferred then to run for some other office, say Governor of the State?

KELLY: At that time, no. No, I thought...

MARTIN: Why, Bill, did you think he should go for Senate?

KELLY: Well, I think he made quite an impression and quite a record in his three terms in Congress and I think by by-passing the governorship of Massachusetts, it was a stepping-stone towards the presidency. In fact, the first time I introduced him, in the senatorial campaign in the East Boston High School, I introduced him that night as the future President of the United States.

MARTIN: What year was that?

KELLY: That was in 1952.

MARTIN: Bill, your work in the Senate campaign, did it run along lines similar to that that you did for Congress?

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KELLY: Yes. The campaign was carried on almost exactly the same as the campaign for Congress. It was broadened and we worked with headquarters in Boston. And if we were caught up with our work in the campaign in East Boston we would take our volunteers into headquarters at Kilby Street and Batterymarch Street, and carry on with whatever work they had there. In one instance we circulated throughout the state or got ready for circulation throughout the state, fifty thousand pamphlets printed in Italian, and they were handled by the people of East Boston in the furtherance of the campaign for Senate. The fellow who was supposed to handle it fell down on the job and they were laying there at Kilby Street, and they had to be sent out so we took it on our shoulders to send them out, and they went out.

MARTIN: Were they sent out by mail, you mean?

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: You also mention Eunice and Pat in the congressional fight. Now there was a third sister joined him in this particular fight.

KELLY: When we started the campaign for the Senate much to my surprise and much to my elation, Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith] came along with Pat and Eunice, and they were a grand team, let me tell you. They would

meet with me about every night, when they were in this part of the state, and we had it so figured, that we would have some one of them, in that part of the district or that part of the state sometime during each week of the campaign. One time we had them for four days and we went from one end of the town to the other with my wife and other women, and each one took one of the sisters, and they pulled doorbells, went in and sat down, and when they left those houses they had votes in their pockets for Jack.

MARTIN: Billy, when they ran around on their, moved around on the famous coffee with the Kennedys, which didn't really get prominence until the '52 fight, I assumed they had some over in East Boston. Were they a little bit more elaborate than the ones you ran in?

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KELLY: No, the real coffee parties, that they refer to as coffee parties, and teas, were run on a large scale. In fact, we had one of these at the East Boston High School during the senatorial campaign at which we had probably twenty-five hundred people in attendance. You couldn't get into the hall. And that was put on a more elaborate scale. We had about fifty hostesses there that night; Mrs. Kennedy was there herself, Jack's mother, and we set up a receiving line: there was Jack, Eunice, Pat, Jean, Mrs. Kennedy, Joe Timilty [Joseph P. Timilty] was there that night; Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] was there that night; and I think every individual in the hall came up to shake the hand of Mrs. Kennedy and her son, Jack, and the girls. It went over very big.

MARTIN: How did they serve that coffee? Was it buffet style?

KELLY: It was buffet style. We had tables set up in the lobby of the high school and we had hostesses there. And they had little sandwiches and refreshments, cake, coffee, other drinks, soft drinks, and so on; and nobody was left out and nobody was forgotten.

MARTIN: Then of course you had to have the political overtone. Did the candidate get up and give a little talk?

KELLY: Oh yes. In addition to the tea, we had a regular rally.

MARTIN: Oh, I see.

KELLY: We conducted a regular rally from the stage. We had different speakers. Of course the principal speaker of the evening was the candidate, and...

MARTIN: Did you invite candidates of the lesser offices to speak at these things too? I mean...

KELLY: Sometimes they would show up and we would show them the courtesy of allowing them to speak their piece and to meet the people in the hall. We barred

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nobody. I might touch on another affair we had down in the McKay School, which was in the heart of the Italian district of the town. We had a rally set up down there and a fellow in the office at 18 Tremont, no, down here in Batterymarch Street, decided to call the rally off. I knew nothing at all about it. I had made arrangements that night to have a wagon with floodlights there and banners on the building there and all, and about five hours before the rally was to be pulled off I was notified it was cancelled. So I went over to Batterymarch Street. I think the fellow's name was Flood, I'm not sure.

MARTIN: Dick Flood [Richard Flood].

KELLY: Yes. And I wanted to know why. He said, "There'll be nobody there, we've had big rallies." And I said, "Well, you're going to be there. You're going to be the first speaker. The rally's going on." He said, "All right, you won't get them there." I said, "Listen, I won't have anybody in the hall until probably eight-thirty or a quarter of nine. I want you there at eight-thirty. And if there's nobody there at nine o'clock, I'll close the hall. And I guarantee that before nine o'clock you won't be able to get in the hall." Sure enough my statement was borne out and at nine o'clock the candidate showed up and he had great trouble in getting to the stage; people stopping him and shaking his hand and all this stuff. Well, Mr. Flood made the first speech. And he apologized to me afterwards. He didn't know we would get the crowd we did. And I explained to him why we had the rally in that particular area. That was Joe Kennedy's bailiwick in days gone by and we contacted the old timers and we also contacted a lot of the old-time Italian people in the district, and they showed up in droves. And as a result of that rally I had about twenty-five Italian people that agreed to go to work on polls for me, passing out Kennedy literature.

MARTIN: Well, you know, Bill, right at that time his opponent, Henry Cabot Lodge, had Italian roots, you know.

KELLY: That's right.

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MARTIN: And there was a strong pro-Italian regard for Lodge.

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: Was that evident during those...?

KELLY: I'll tell you an incident on that. The story circulated from Day Square down to the other end of town that it was a red hot Lodge district, and the Friday night before election Braggiotti, Mrs. Braggiotti [Francesca Braggiotti] from Connecticut, was coming up for a rally for Lodge on Saturday night. Well, there was a Democratic rally in the McKay School on Friday night, and Jack was scheduled to go in there at nine-thirty. But due to other commitments he couldn't make it. He had to go to Revere [Revere, Massachusetts], Winthrop [Winthrop, Massachusetts], Chelsea [Chelsea, Massachusetts]. Well, I contacted Grace Burke [Grace M. Burke] and wanted to know what Jack's itinerary was. She told me that Jack, at that time, was at a radio station, and I called him. And I told him if he came after ten-thirty, it would be useless. There would be nobody in the hall. And I brought out the fact that John Lodge's wife would be the principal speaker at the meeting the next evening, and I asked him if he could make it. He asked me to pick him up in Chelsea. I picked him up in Chelsea at ten o'clock. We came over from Chelsea to East Boston in two cars. We almost tipped a patrol wagon over on Chelsea Street going to the Donald McKay School. I had made arrangements with Mario Umana who was Chairman of the Committee that night, Chairman of the rally, that when Jack came in he would stop whoever was speaking and allow Jack to go on. We got to the door and he stopped the man that was speaking. He put Jack on. Jack spoke for about five minutes. He had to make a radio appearance at eleven o'clock. And we had to just form a flying wedge to get him out of the hall and away from the people. Now that rally was predominantly Italian. Another instance I would like to bring out on that... On Columbus Day of that year we had a parade in East Boston, a local celebration. And Jack was very much concerned the way conditions were going over there. He was concerned about the Italian vote so he asked me how it was. So I said, "Jack, from Orient Heights down to Day Square I'm not going to give you any reading, because it's solid." But I said, "When the

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parade is finished... No, I'll let you answer your own question. From Day Square down, you pay particular attention to the reception you receive and at the end of the parade you can answer your own question." The parade got to Day Square and from Day Square going down through Bennington Street, down to the Airport where the parade wound up, it was just like one mob coming out and shaking his hand and telling they were with him and all this. At the end of the parade I said, "Jack, has your question been answered?" And he said, "Definitely, Billy, so that was that." So Mr. Lodge didn't do too tell in East Boston.

MARTIN: What was the vote over there at that election?

KELLY: I think Jack polled about fifteen thousand, five hundred in that neighborhood and Lodge polled around three thousand. It was a heavy vote. There was about eighteen or nineteen thousand votes that year.

MARTIN: Of course there were many reasons why that district would go so strongly for Jack Kennedy. Do you think one of the reasons might be the fact that he had strong ties over there? His parents, you know...

KELLY: Well, that helped, but at that time a lot of the old-timers either had moved out or had died off, and a lot of people that you mention the older Kennedys to amongst the younger group had no idea who they were and we had to sell them. But as soon as we'd get contact with the old-timers and those that knew the Kennedy family, then our problem was practically solved.

MARTIN: Sure.

KELLY: And in reality it was the Kennedy connection or the Kennedy family that started the ball rolling without a question of a doubt.

MARTIN: Can you recall any amusing incidents connected with that particular fight over there?

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KELLY: There was so much that happened that it's really...

MARTIN: You worked long hours didn't you?

KELLY: Oh, yes. It was just a twenty-four hour-a-day proposition, and it was something that you really gave your life to and you loved doing it.

MARTIN: Why, Billy, would you work for Jack Kennedy like that? I mean a lot of them around might be interested in some personal gain from it, but...

KELLY: Well, at the time I had no thought of personal gain. I was with the City of Boston and had been with the city for years. I just felt he was a different type of individual. He was apart from the politician and felt that he would be a sincere congressman. I think he would give the job everything he had. And I think he would have the interest of the people of the district at heart and I think down through the years I've been proved correct.

MARTIN: Did you think at the time that he was going to go a lot further than United States Senator?

KELLY: Oh yes, the first time I met the man, the first time I met the man as a politician ...when I first met him as a politician when he announced his candidacy, I didn't think he had much on the ball at all. He was very retiring; you had to lead him by the hand; you had to push him into poolrooms, taverns, clubs, organizations...

MARTIN: He didn't like that, did he?

KELLY: He didn't like it at first. He wanted no part of it, and he just went along with it and finally he could see it, and he became one of the greatest campaigners I think that we have ever seen. And that was all learned, and learned the hard way, in the old Eleventh Congressional District.

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MARTIN: You know, Bill, after that '52 Senate fight, did you have any associations with him then?

KELLY: Yes, after the '52 fight I kept in touch with him. We had him to the house for dinner about three or four times and sometimes on the way to the Airport he would drop in and say hello to the wife. We had dinner with him a couple of times outside of the house.

MARTIN: Was he sick about that time, too? He went into the hospital after his election.

KELLY: Yes. He was operated on at that time and he was in the hospital for quite some time. He gave us a reception, gave all the secretaries a reception at the Meadows one time and he came to the reception on crutches. And he was in pretty tough shape that night.

MARTIN: Did you ever go down to Hyannis Port [Hyannis Port, Massachusetts]?

KELLY: No, I never went to Hyannis Port. He invited me down time and time again, but I don't know, I had no desire to go down. I could see him anytime I wanted in Boston and I contacted him in Washington. And I felt that was part of his life that he should have to himself.

MARTIN: Well, did you work with him in connection with refugees at that time?

KELLY: Yes, I had a half a dozen cases; three from Ireland and about three or four from Italy. Their families were in tough shape and I have correspondence in my files at home yet from a little Irish girl that lost her family and she was all alone over there and didn't know where to turn, and a priest in the district contacted me and asked if I could do anything for her. So I sent the data down to Jack in Washington and within a period of fifteen days that little girl was here in Boston. There was another old man over in Ireland. Well, he was quite sick and needed special treatment and we contacted Jack on that case. And this old man had a priest who had a brother out in Indiana, and I

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guess they had started to work on the case out there. They couldn't do anything, so Jack contacted the American Ambassador to Ireland and arrangements were made and the man

was flown over, landed at East Boston Airport and taken directly from the Airport to the Boston City Hospital. And the cases in Italy, they were district refugees; they had no homes; no means of livelihood. Through Jack's efforts, there was one family of five came over in a body. There were others singly and a couple of brothers came over, and they are in this country now. I've got a number of documents and letters from Jack on these cases. And my greatest help in doing this work was Grace Burke, who is downstairs now. Graces used to do a lot of it.

MARTIN: Well, you know, Billy, you kept in contact with him as you say from time to time. Then when he was running for re-election, I think in 1958, he ran again in East Boston, didn't he?

KELLY: Yes.

MARTIN: And it wasn't much of a campaign, really.

KELLY: No. I was down in Weymouth [Weymouth, Massachusetts] at the time.

MARTIN: Oh, yes. Did you work on that campaign at all?

KELLY: Not too much. He didn't need any work. He didn't need any work.

MARTIN: A lot of it was voter registration.

KELLY: That's right. It was a foregone conclusion.

MARTIN: Then of course the big campaign for President.

KELLY: Yes.

MARTIN: That spread out across on a national scale. You didn't get involved in that?

[-17-]

KELLY: Well, I was involved in a small way down through Squantum [Squantum, Quincy, Massachusetts] in my area, down there. In one part of the campaign they couldn't get any material. There were no posters, no buttons, or anything, and Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] finally came to Boston and brought along a lot of supplies with him. And I had recruited a small batch of people down in Weymouth and in Braintree [Braintree, Massachusetts] and some in Quincy [Quincy, Massachusetts] and with the help and assistance of those people we got literature and banners and posters out through the South Shore area. Otherwise there would have been nothing down there.

MARTIN: Bill, he was elected in November of 1960 and I think a month later he came to Boston and made a famous speech before the Massachusetts Legislature.

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: Do you remember that?

KELLY: I do. I do.

MARTIN: I think you mentioned something about being invited to attend that. Here it is.

KELLY: On the personal side, I would like to bring out the consideration he had for his friends. I would like to cite the follow: Before his inauguration as President he addressed a joint session of the Massachusetts Legislature.

Mrs. Kelly and myself were present and at the conclusion of his address he came over to us and wanted to know if we had received our invitations and tickets for the inauguration. I told him we had received a general invitation but no tickets. Within a few days we received special honored guest tickets to the White House, tickets for the Parade Stand at the White House and also tickets for the ball which was held at the Armory that night. We also had lunch at the White House.

MARTIN: You had quite an exciting day.

[-18-]

KELLY: We drove down the Wednesday, the inauguration was on Friday, we drove down on Wednesday and the next day was the day of the snowstorm, and we had a beautiful day driving down. And I will say this, the morning of the inauguration it was quite cold and I did see Jack leaving the White House with President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] on his way to the Capital to take the oath, and he gave us a great how d'you do and a great salute.

MARTIN: He recognized you?

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: Gee, that's wonderful.

KELLY: That's right.

MARTIN: What kind of thrill was it to see him up there?

KELLY: Oh, it was marvelous! It's a feeling you couldn't describe. I know the thought that struck me went back to 1946 when I first sat down with him and we started to discuss his candidacy for Congress, and I turned around to my wife and I said, "Did you ever think that in a few short years we'd see him take the oath of office as President of the United States?" And she said, "Yes, I always did think he would take the oath of office as President of the United States."

MARTIN: Bill, after he became President did you ever get down to the White House to see him?

KELLY: Well, I was down there. I had an appointment to see him in the early part of '61, but something came up, I think his father was taken sick and he had flown to Florida, and the appointment was cancelled. I was also down in Washington a week before the assassination. I was on a conference with the Savings Bonds Division and I made an effort to make a contact with him, but he had left Washington for something and I lost out on the appointment.

[-19-]

MARTIN: But then later on, of course, he did reach you. Tell us about that.

KELLY: Oh, yes. I'd like to bring out this further incident in reference to his consideration of his friends and to show he always had a thought for those that were close to him. On an evening in July of 1961 I was at home and I received a long distance call from the White House. When I received the call I thought someone was giving me a ribbing and I asked who was trying to kid me. Much to my surprise it was the President himself, and I was the most surprised individual in the world. The purpose of the call was a request from Jack that I enter government service in the promotion of the United States Savings Bond Program. Because of the fact that I had retired from the City, I was kind of hesitant about accepting, but who can say not to the President of the United States? In a few days I received a call from Mr. Francis B. Bliss, State Director United States Savings Bond Division in Boston, and he requested that I join his staff. I did so and I found out that the program is one that was very close to the heart of our President, Jack Kennedy. It is very fitting on that May 1, 1964, a new savings bond in the amount of seventy-five dollars was issued by the United States Treasury with the picture of the late President on the bond and his famous statement, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Since the inception of the bond, I can say from personal experience it has proved to be a very fine stimulus to the bond program, and I think it's a great honor to be given to our late President, Jack Kennedy.

MARTIN: Did you attend his funeral?

KELLY: No, I didn't. I thought it would be too much of a strain going down there. I didn't feel that we should intrude at that time and that the family should be left to themselves. There were enough spectators down there without our

going, but our hearts and souls were with Mrs. Kennedy and the family.

[-20-]

MARTIN: Bill, what single quality of character would you say Jack Kennedy possessed that sort of set him apart from many people?

KELLY: Well, I don't think there are words in the English language to describe the character the man had. He was one of those individuals that once he met you, and once you became acquainted with him, that he was always considering your well being, not only your well being, but the welfare of the entire community and nation. And I can't find words enough to describe what he meant to me and what he must have meant to the people of the country.

MARTIN: Billy, what would you say off-hand is your best memory of him?

KELLY: My best memory of Jack is this. My youngest daughter was about to get married and her friends had decided to give her a shower. Well, I was with Jack that week and I told him the shower was on a Friday night. And I told him about it. He said, "Billy, if I'm in Boston I'll drop in." "Well, Jack," I said, "there'll be all women there." He said, "That's all right, Billy, I'll be there." I thought he was kidding me, but sure enough that night about nine o'clock in comes Jack to the shower, and he started there until twelve-thirty, believe it or not. And a lot of the women folk called home and when their husbands found out that Jack was there, they came over, and we had a real wingding that night with Jack Kennedy [Laughter].

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-21-]

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