

Pierre E.G. Salinger Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 7/19/1965
Administrative Information

Creator: Pierre E.G. Salinger

Interviewer: Theodore H. White

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Biographical Note

Salinger was an investigator for the U.S. Senate Select Committee to Investigate Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Field (1957-1959); Press Secretary to Senator John F. Kennedy (1959-1960); and Press Secretary to President Kennedy (1959-1963) and President Johnson (1963-1964). In this interview, he discusses his work with Robert F. Kennedy on the Senate Select Committee to Investigate Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field; his introduction to John F. Kennedy (JFK) and work coordinating press relations on JFK's 1960 presidential campaign; the 1960 Democratic primaries in Wisconsin and West Virginia; the 1960 Democratic National Convention; the Kennedy-Nixon debates, and the possibility of a recount in the 1960 presidential election, among other issues.

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Pierre E.G. Salinger—JFK #1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Pierre E.G. Salinger

July 19, 1965
Los Angeles, California

By Theodore H. White

For the John F. Kennedy Library

WHITE: Pierre, what we want to do is just a normal recording. I think we ought to keep our language, or at least I'm going to try to keep my language, as clean as possible. We don't know who will be listening to this or whether it will be listened to. I would suggest and I would urge on them that they make a transcript of the thing and that you then censor the transcript and make only the transcript available—those portions of the transcript available now and other portions after your death or after fifty years.

I don't think that we have to be precise about many dates, only those dates that concern you alone because there will be thousands of scholars and historians checking

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everything to the hour and the half hour of every day.

What we are going to try to do is to get at Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] personal contribution to the history of American politics and then the history of American statecraft. I think that we can develop his personality as well that way if we started off with his personality traits. So, let's kick in with the first question I suggest. Have you been interviewed on tape?

SALINGER: I have been interviewed on tape a number of times although I prefer to

have my finger on the typewriter key.

WHITE: All right. When did you go down to see Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy]? It must have been in the beginning of '57.

SALINGER: No. I went down to see Bobby for the first time in October of '56. I was then the contributing editor of *Collier's* magazine. I was doing a series of articles about Jimmy Hoffa and Dave Beck. I had talked to the editors of the magazine who had scheduled the articles for February of '57. There was a little item in the *New York Herald Tribune* one morning which indicated that Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan] and Bob Kennedy

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were going to get permission from the Senate to investigate racketeering in labor unions. They had come across it in connection with some other investigations they were having.

I told Gordon Manning I would go to Washington and see Bobby Kennedy and see if I could arrange to have our articles come out about the same time as their hearings would start so that there would be a peg on them.

I went to the Senate Office Building and had an appointment with him for lunch. I remember afterwards that the most curious thing about this so-called interview I was going to have with this young man was that I never got a question in. We went to the Senate dining room for lunch. He spent the whole lunch interviewing me about what I knew about Beck and Hoffa and asking me what I had developed, and I told him. We did have a cursory discussion about when the hearings would start. It worked out that they were going to start in February, so we scheduled our piece.

I went back to New York and finished the pieces. As you know, *Collier's* went out of business on the 15th

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of December, 1956.

Several days later I got a phone call from Bobby Kennedy whom I had only met that one time. He asked me what I was going to do with the material that I had gathered.

WHITE: He called you.

SALINGER: Right. I asked him why. He said that if I had no other plans for it, he would like to have the material. So I said I would be glad to give it to him. A couple of days later Carmine Bellino [Carmine Salvatore Bellino] and Paul Tierney [Paul J. Tierney] came to my office. I had then moved from *Collier's* to *House and Home*, which is a *Time, Life* affiliate. They came to my office. We went to lunch somewhere—I forget where it was—and we went through the records that I had.

Now, a couple of other curious things happened. Paul Smith [Paul C. Smith], who I had worked for at *Collier's*, got a phone call from Einar Mohn, the International Vice

President for the Teamsters Union. He wanted to know if I would go to work for the Teamsters Union as their public relations director.

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WHITE: Oh, no.

SALINGER: He offered me twenty thousand dollars a year to take that job. I had the feeling at the time that the reason they were trying to give me the job was that I had amassed so much information on Beck and Hoffa that they thought it would be safer to have me working for them.

A day later I got a call from Bobby Kennedy. This was now along in the early part of January. Bobby said that the committee had been put together and would I be interested in going to work for the committee as an investigator. He had seen the material and said that he was impressed by it. I made the decision to go to work for him as an investigator, even though I might say, parenthetically, that he offered me about half the money the Teamsters offered me.

Then I had to go down to have an interview with John McClellan. I was the first investigator hired by the Senate Rackets Committee and I had been introduced to him by Bobby as a former newspaperman. I remember that he said he was going to hire me and then he looked

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across the desk at me and he said, "If I ever hear you talking to the press, I will deal with you in the harshest manner possible."

I quit *House and Home*, for which I had worked about six weeks, and reported to work for Bobby Kennedy on St. Valentine's Day.

WHITE: Bobby was your boss.

SALINGER: My boss. I reported to him on St. Valentine's Day in 1957. This will go down as one of the most interesting days of my life. I arrived for work and Bobby was busy. He called me in his office and he said, "I'm not going to be able to talk to you for a couple of hours. I've got this subpoena I've got to serve. Will you go down and serve this subpoena for me?" So I said, fine. I looked at the subpoena and it was made out for Einar Mohn. I had never called Mohn or indicated to him whether I was going to take this job or not.

I walked down the Hill from the Senate Office Building to the Teamster Building which is right below it. I got appointment and went up and saw Mohn. I had known Mohn for a number of years. He was an old

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San Franciscan. I wanted in his office and said, "Einar, you know you offered me a job as public relations director for the Teamsters." I said, "I want you to know I was also offered another job at the same time and that was investigator for the Senate Labor Rackets Committee. I'm here to tell you which job I've accepted. Here," and I handed him the subpoena.

WHITE: Oh, God.

SALINGER: I must say about Einar that he had enough of a sense of humor that the whole thing amused him a little bit. Well, I'm going the long way around, but I think it helps to set the background for this to tell the story. I spent the day in the office and that night Bobby asked me if I would come out to dinner.

WHITE: Where was Bobby living then?

SALINGER: Bobby was living in McLean, the same house he lives in now. I had driven down from New York and I had most of my worldly belongings in the back of the car. I was going to stay with a friend of mine that lived in Georgetown. As I drove with Bobby, he said, "You

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know, I think I made a terrible mistake in hiring you." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, we've had nothing but FBI agents, Naval Intelligence, and CIA men, but we never had an ex-newspaperman in this kind of work." I said, "What concerns you?" He said, "They have all this experience." I said, "As far as I'm concerned, any newspaperman who is qualified one and has had experience is as good as any kind of the people you've described." "Well," he said, "I think you ought to stay around Washington for about three or four months and kind of get the feeling for how we handle things and everything." I said, "Fine, if that's what you want. Good."

We went to the house and sat down for dinner, and it was the first I had met Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]. We got the main course and Ethel said, "What would you like to drink?" I said, "I'd like a glass of wine." She said, "You know, we've never had any wine in this house."

WHITE: Really?

SALINGER: This is true. So I said, "Well, Mrs. Kennedy, don't worry about it. I happen to have a bottle in my suitcase."

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I had a couple of bottles on very good California wine. I went out and opened my suitcase, brought it into the house, and we had the wine. The reason I throw that

in is because that is a fact. They didn't have any wine in the house. The whole evolution of the Kennedys is...

WHITE: Amazing.

SALINGER: Interesting.

WHITE: I keep thinking of the last party three weeks ago. Go ahead.

SALINGER: Anyway, we had a very pleasant evening that night. I went home. I stayed with a fellow named Charlie Henderson who then worked for Jack Shelley [John F. Shelley] who was then the congressman from San Francisco. The next morning the phone rang at 7 o'clock in the morning, and it was Bobby Kennedy. He said, "How fast do you think you can get ready to go to Seattle?" I said, "I thought you wanted me to stay for four months." He said, "Well, I changed my mind last night. Can you get a plane to Seattle this afternoon?"

 So the next day I went to Seattle. I was on the road

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for 260 of those days of that year. But then we come up to how I met John F. Kennedy...

WHITE: Let me stop you here because the business of a newspaperman having a subpoena gives you a way to investigate that nobody else has got.

SALINGER: That's right.

WHITE: You've got the subpoena down.

SALINGER: That's right.

WHITE: All right. Before then there had been Roy Cohn [Roy M. Cohn] and Dave Schine [G. David Schine] and all those other guys who were using the government power to investigate. Would you say Bobby was casual about the government thing?

SALINGER: Not at all. That was one thing I remember about my conversations with Bobby. He was very, very keenly aware of the powers of a congressional committee but also the limitations of it. He would talk to every investigator before he went on the road about the proper use of the subpoena—the fact that these were not to be used just for fishing expeditions. You had to have some legitimate reason to believe that what you were

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going after was there. In other words, he had been through the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] hearings; he had worked with Cohn and Schine. He was very deeply aware of the fact that the very nature of the congressional committee made it necessary for a committee to have a clear legislative purpose; that was the thing that was drummed into us quite a bit.

WHITE: Okay. I want to get how you met John F. Kennedy the first time. Do you want to tell that exactly as is or do you want to tell that exactly as is or do you want to tell me what impression you had of John F. Kennedy from Bobby? Jack must have already dominated Bobby's thinking.

SALINGER: Well, let me go back on John F. Kennedy for a minute because I already had an impression of John F. Kennedy which I gathered at the 1956 Democratic Convention.

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: I had been a roommate of a fellow named Teddie White [Laughter]. I had been on the floor of the Convention the night of the great Kefauver [Estes Kefauver]-Kennedy thing and

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then I had seen Kennedy come on. I at that time formed an impression of him as a man who was a real comer in the Democratic Party. I had twice worked for Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. When I went to work for Bob Kennedy, I must say in frankness that I had not arrived at any opinion about the 1960 presidential campaign. In fact, at that moment politics was the farthest thing from my mind. Because *Collier's* had been shot out from under me.... I had worked for *House and Home*. I had then gone to work for Bobby, and I was really not thinking of politics. I was thinking of doing the best possible job I could in the Senate Rackets Committee.

My first meeting with John F. Kennedy was so casual that I could not tell you the precise date, the hour or any of the events that took place. It was during a committee hearing. In other words, I was working with Bobby, who was the chief counsel of the committee. The members of the committee come in, one after the other, the senators, and suddenly there was John F. Kennedy

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WHITE: Would this be the spring or the fall of 1957?

SALINGER: This was in the spring of 1957. The hearings on Dave Beck.... Because through a very big quirk of fate, I had been able to break a case that they had been trying to break for some time on the coast, so I had come back for these hearings.

There I found myself sitting to the left of Bob Kennedy working with him on some material I had developed, and then suddenly there on my left I found another Kennedy, John F. Kennedy.

As I sat there listening to the first couple days of this hearing—I remember it vividly—it became very evident to me that here was an uncommon man.

WHITE: Why do you say uncommon, Pierre?

SALINGER: Well, first, I think I was impressed by the amount of work that he had put in to prepare himself for these hearings. There were eight senators on this committee. Most of them came to these committee hearings completely unprepared. I think I should mention the names of the senators so you will know who we are talking about. Of course, there was one senator on the Republican side

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who was excellent. That was Irving Ives [Irving McNeil Ives]. Then there was Karl Mundt [Karl Earl Mundt] and Joe McCarthy and Barry Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater]. On the Democratic side, we had John F. Kennedy, John McClellan, who was also a man who was well prepared for these hearings, who did his homework. We had the Senator from North Carolina, San Ervin [Sam J. Ervin, Jr.] and, as I recall, Senator McNamara [Patrick V. McNamara] of Michigan. I don't think he was the original Democrat on the committee when I came on.

John F. Kennedy had clearly done his homework. Second of all, in what is essentially a nebulous area, he was very incisive in his questioning; he was able, with a question or two, to do what it seemed to me to take hours to get to from other people on the committee. But, I say, beyond that, as far as I was concerned. I was Bobby's man. I worked for Bobby. My whole indoctrination with John F. Kennedy was through Bobby.

WHITE: One question: did he impress you as being frail physically or strong physically?

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SALINGER: I had no impression of him as being frail. I had no particular impression of him as being strong, but he didn't impress me as being frail.

His attendance record was excellent; he would come to these hearings with regularity. He was interested in them. He was at the time working at the labor legislation. I remember he used to separate his labor work as the hearings developed. He had Carmine Bellino, Paul Tierney, a fellow named Duffy [La Verne Duffy] and myself who would advise him on the Rackets Committee part of his labor work. Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan], who was his staff expert on the Senate Labor Committee, who was the expert on labor law, would come in every once in a while but didn't get involved in the Rackets Committee side of the thing, but would get involved in the legislative side.

But really, when I think about it through '57, he worked very closely with Bobby and would always sit next to Bobby. Very often I would end up sitting next to them or between them. I would have the material. I would make it available to the Senator or to Bobby— whichever one wanted it. I remember they used to kid

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me a little bit at the time because I was probably the most.... I testified before the committee probably more than any other human being. They used to kid me about my facility as a witness.

Other than that there was really very little rapport. Really, you have to go through '57, '58, and the early part of '59. Early part of '59 we got involved.... That's the thing I recall very vividly. First of all, there was the hearing on Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] and the Kohler strike which became a bitter struggle between...

WHITE: That was the Kohler strike in Wisconsin.

SALINGER: Right.

WHITE: The longest strike in modern American history.

SALINGER: Yes.

WHITE: Go ahead.

SALINGER: It was a bitter, bitter struggle between Bob and John F. Kennedy, and Karl Mundt and Carl Curtis [Carl T. Curtis] and Barry Goldwater on the Republican side. They were obviously out to get Walter Reuther on the flimsiest grounds. I was impressed particularly with the courage of John F. Kennedy at that time because he, as a committee member,

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really went out of his way to attempt to get the record clear about Reuther's involvement in this strike.

But also at that time we got involved in an investigation at Gary, Indiana, involving the mayor of Gary, Indiana [George Chacharis], who was a leading Democrat. Duffy and one other investigator had developed some information of a derogatory nature about this mayor.

We had a meeting in John F. Kennedy's office because we.... Now, we are starting to talk a little bit about the possibilities of his running for president.

WHITE: This is after he is reelected in 1958?

SALINGER: Been reelected in '58. In fact, there had been some talk of my going up there in '58 and working for him in the campaign. It was decided that I

should stay in Washington and work with Bobby in '58.

Bob Thompson [Robert E. Thompson], who was then with the *New York News* [*New York Daily News*] was hired as his press secretary for the '58 campaign. I never went to Massachusetts during the '58 campaign.

But now it's early '59. He had won the '58 campaign by a wide majority. We had this problem in

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Indiana. I remember Duffy and I went up there. We were about to go to Gary to really go and work on this case and the President—I refer to him as the President—started to talk philosophically about.... He had no objection to the investigation of this Democrat on the ground that we might be hurting his political campaign, but he did have a theory about wounding a tiger. "A wounded tiger," he said, "was always more dangerous than either a living or a dead tiger." I remember him looking at me very carefully and saying, "If you're going to go out there and conduct this investigation, don't wound him—kill him."

WHITE: This was in the Senate office?

SALINGER: This was in the Senate office. This was really one of the insights that I got into John F. Kennedy which in a great way separated him from Bob because John F. Kennedy had the exterior façade of such an easy-going nature, and yet with this one remark he revealed something to me that I was later to find in him in other situations; for example, the Cuban Missile Crisis.

WHITE: Fantastic. Go on. Go on just as you're going.

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SALINGER: I understood exactly what he meant. He said, "Don't start on this thing unless you're going to finish it off." This is the way he approached a great many things in government once he became president. If I can't think of anything anecdotal in this thing, I'll come back to it, but I just can't because.... The whole period was involved working for Bobby. I lived at Bobby's house part of the time. We became great personal friends. I did not have a single social relationship with John F. Kennedy except when I might run into him at one of Bobby's parties.

WHITE: I want to bring you very quickly to when the presidential campaign is first started and when you are asked to join, but before we go to that.... You were then investigating in the Teamsters one of the seamiest and most corrupt areas of American life. It's horrible. These are often guys who use blackjacks and everything else. You must have gotten from Kennedy's questioning the impression of whether he was shocked or sad or whether he was technical or surgical about the whole thing. Can you remember any emotional reaction of his to the kind of stuff you brought back?

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SALINGER: Well, I would say he was shocked, but I'd say it was a kind of a different shock than Bobby at this point. I think Bobby is an entirely different man today than when I first knew him in 1956.

The great difference between Bobby and John F. Kennedy in those days was that everything was black and white for Bobby in those days. There were no gray areas. But John F. Kennedy had the facility to see the fact that life was not a black and white proposition, that there were a lot of gray areas in life. As a matter of fact, the most sensitive investigation that we conducted from this standpoint of gray areas was the Shefferman [Nathan W. Shefferman] investigation which was one which interested him a great deal, where we were not involved with direct racketeering from the standpoint of gangsters and hoodlums, but involved in investigating a man who made a fortune beating down unions by the most subtle type of means. You really had to be a student of labor law. This is where he really shined because he understood the subtleties of this particular hearing which were very difficult to understand unless you knew something about

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labor-management relations or about the way these things were done. That was the principal thing about him, that he did understand these grays.

So far as Hoffa was concerned, there was no quarter.... I mean, this was not just a technical discussion of some man who was off in far space. Hoffa became an individual, somebody to be thought of day and night even more so by Bobby than by the President. I remember one night we had worked till midnight, 12:30 or 1 o'clock in morning. Bobby was driving me home. We pulled out of the parking lot in the Senate Office Building and drove down the street. The route takes you right by the Teamster Building. We looked up and the light was on in Jimmie Hoffa's office. He said, "As long as he's working, we are." We turned around, went back to the Senate Office Building and went back to work.

WHITE: God. You wanted to beat the competitor.

SALINGER: You bet. The night we finished the first Hoffa hearing we had been going for seven weeks, twenty, twenty-one hours a day. It had been a very successful hearing. That night I gave a party in my house in Georgetown for

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all the members of the staff. Bobby was there with Ethel and a lot of people. There were 75 to 100 people there that night. The party broke up about 2:30 in the morning. At 4 o'clock in the morning the phone rang next to my bed. It was Bobby on the phone. He said, "I'll be by and pick you up in a half an hour. We're going down to the office and start working on the report."

WHITE: All right. I've got that distinction now. Let me take you now then where in early '59 John F. Kennedy has been reelected senator. Slowly he's moved into your life. You've had some sort of appreciation for him. You heard the conversation around, both before and after '58, that he might run for president.

SALINGER: I'd say by early '59 there was no question in my mind that he was going to run for president.

WHITE: Now, when were you brought into this thing? By whom?

SALINGER: This is an interesting story because by early '59 I knew he was going to run for president. I had my own personal decision that I wanted to be part of that campaign, but nothing had been said by anybody.

In May of '59 I got call from Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler]. He

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asked me to come down and see him at the Democratic National Committee. I went to a meeting that was held. Paul Butler, Charlie Murphy [Charles S. Murphy] and one other person whose name I can't remember were there. The Democratic Advisory Council was then in operation—I remember that was the leading...

WHITE: Finletter [Thomas K. Finletter]...

SALINGER: Finletter and Stevenson. They were unhappy with the projection of the image of that group as well as the projection of the image of the Democratic Party.

WHITE: Jim Finnegan [James Finnegan] was probably there.

SALINGER: No. He was not at this meeting. Somebody else that you would know very well. I'll think of it.

The brunt, however.... Butler came right to the point. He said, "Look, I've studied the history of the party. We've got a great chance to win the presidency in 1960. What we need is a Charlie Michaelson. We think you could be a Charlie Michaelson for the Democratic Party. We would like to bring you in and make you public relations director of the Democratic Advisory Council, and we want you to start planning the strategy

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for the 1960 campaign, public relations wise. We want to start a drumfire of attack on Republicans. Every time a Republican sticks his head above water, we go after him. Development of the issues." I said, "That's a fascinating idea. Something I would like to do very much. However, there's only one drawback to this that I can see, and that is, if I am

working for the Democratic National Committee, I'll have to work for all the candidates of the Democratic Party. As far as I'm concerned, I've chosen my candidate for 1960." Butler said, "Who's your candidate?" And I said, "John Kennedy." Butler said, "Well, frankly, I don't think it's a problem." He said, "I think you could find your way clear to work for all these candidates and then end up working for the nominee of the party, whoever he is."

It was a very attractive offer. I was tired of being a cop anyway by this time. I had worked for the committee for twenty-six months. So I went down to see Bobby. I said, "Bobby, I've been offered this job. It's a very attractive job. I'd like to take it." Bobby said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I think you're right. I think you're going in the right direction. Will

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you give me twenty-four hours before you take the job?" I said, "Sure." The next morning I got a telephone call in the office from Senator Kennedy. He said, "I'd like you to come up." I went up to his office. He said, "Pierre, we're going to have a campaign for president, and I'd like you to be in that campaign." I said, "Okay." He said, "I'll let you know when we need you."

WHITE: May, 1959.

SALINGER: May, 1959. That was our entire conversation. He did not discuss what role I was going to play in the campaign; he did not discuss what they were going to pay me. That was the whole conversation because I had figured by that time that my relationship with the Kennedys was such that I didn't have to ask a question like that. I knew that whatever I needed would be taken care of. As far as the role was concerned, I wasn't particularly concerned about it.

Along in mid-September, 1959, Bobby called me up and said, "We're going to put you off the payroll of the Senate Committee on the first of October. You're going to work for my brother on the first of October.

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We want you to take over the press operations." So I said, "Fine." I went to see the Senator. I wanted to get some idea of what he wanted me to do. He said, "Well, I expect..."

WHITE: In his office or his home?

SALINGER: In his office in the Senate. He said, "I know you've handled the press in the Stevenson campaign and a couple of others so I think you know what you ought to do. I'm going to leave it up to you. What I want to develop is a good, hard-hitting press operation with the campaign in 1960. You get whoever you need, develop your contacts. You know a lot of newspapermen around this town." In other words, he almost gave me a total *carte blanche* on the thing.

WHITE: Let's go slower on this. He said that we're running a presidential

operation. Where is he sitting at this point? How does he describe his....

SALINGER: Well, he was a senator at the time. He explained to me that they had set up a series of offices in the Esso Building and that these officers were in the name of Stephen Smith [Stephen E. Smith]. In fact, Stephen Smith's name was on

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the door, and that they had at that time maybe four or five girls who were doing state by state operations. They were compiling card files on potential delegates to the national convention of 1960. They were figuring out how many John F. Kennedy had met.

WHITE: He went into this detail with you himself?

SALINGER: He did not. He told me about the office, but this is what I discovered the office was up to when I went to work for him. He did not go into that detail with me. He told me that Steve was running it. I would report to Steve, but I would stay in touch with him.

I asked him if I could bring a girl into the operation. I needed a girl right away. He told me that I could. I called the girl in San Francisco who had been my secretary in the '52 Stevenson campaign. I called her up and asked her if she would like to come to Washington and go to work for me. She did. That was the start of my office; myself and this girl.

WHITE: How long was this conversation, Pierre? You're now about to run for a guy for the presidency. You know he's going to run.

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SALINGER: I would say my conversation with him was maybe five or ten minutes.

WHITE: Is that so?

SALINGER: And my conversation with Bobby about the job was maybe a half hour. One thing the Senator did make very clear to me was that he was hiring me strictly because Bobby had asked me to. While not saying he didn't know me or anything about me, he made it clear that the only reason I was going to work in his operation was because Bobby said I was a good fellow and had done a good job. Therefore, he hired me on Bobby's say-so.

WHITE: When he said to you to run a good press operation, he didn't tell you what you should do, how you should staff? He didn't discuss TV with you at that moment or anything.

SALINGER: We didn't discuss any details.

WHITE: So you had a hunting license rather than a blueprint?

SALINGER: I had a hunting license with the understanding that I would go ahead and do what I thought was necessary. If he saw anything I did that he didn't like, he would let me know about it. The fact of the matter is that that is pretty much the way we worked it until the day

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he died. We never had any really fundamental discussions about press operations except that he knew so much about it. In other words, as we get later on in the discussion in specific events you will see that he would direct the way in which they were handled to a great extent. As to the general day-to-day operations of my office, the mechanics and so on of my office and how we handled our relations with the press, there was very little discussion about that.

Another things that I was to do was to travel with him during the remainder of that year. He was going to hit three, four, five, or six key states where he had been before and where he had wanted to go again. He was going to take a small crew with him which was going to include Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], myself, and, I think, Steve—the idea being to get to know as many county and state leaders as possible.

WHITE: This is subsequent to the first conversation. He wanted a clean operation for this thing.

SALINGER: Very clean. We had the plans, the *Caroline*, which he had just acquired. He wanted to keep as many people

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off the plane as possible so that, for example, if any member of the press wanted to go with us, we would have room to accommodate them.

WHITE: This was in his mind, not yours? You agreed, of course.

SALINGER: Right. He wanted to take as many of the press as possible. I remember we did have one discussion and that was on a philosophical question. That was after about a month that we'd been traveling. The press had been traveling for nothing. I remember telling him it was a bad mistake to take the press for nothing, that we should charge the press. First of all, because after a while it had become questioned by others to carry the press around for nothing, and, second, the press expected to pay their own way. If they were being taken for nothing, they would think we were trying to subsidize them or to do something that was unusual. We then worked out a system where we would send bills to the press for roughly first class airfare for the cities that we covered. We did that from then on.

My first few months with him were extremely difficult because there was absolutely no rapport. I was an

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outside, a complete outsider. Kenny, Larry, and Steve Smith, who had been with him a long time, had all the *entrée* to everything that he wanted to do. I kind of had to feel my way on the outside. It was a very miserable several months for me.

WHITE: A normal thing that anybody asks when somebody offers him a job is: do I have immediate access to you or do I have to go through somebody? Did you ask that question or when did you get immediate access to him?

SALINGER: I always had access to him.

WHITE: You mean you could call him up at any hour of the night or day? You knew that.

SALINGER: I had access to him in the Senate. I knew I had total access to Bob, although this was something that suddenly became very different too, because one of the first things I found out working for John F. Kennedy was that I was no longer working for Bob Kennedy.

We had a release. I forget what was the subject. It doesn't make any difference what the release was about. Bobby called up about the release and had suggested that I get it out. I got it out. It hit the papers. I got

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a call from the Senator who was outraged. He wanted to know why I put this release out. I said to him, "I got a call from Bobby. He dictated it to me." He said, "You don't work for Bobby any more. You work for me."

WHITE: When was this?

SALINGER: This was along, I would say, in October or November of 1959.

WHITE: That was about the way he said it?

SALINGER: Yes.

WHITE: He was boss. Go ahead.

SALINGER: He wanted to make it very clear that I knew I was working for him and not Bobby any more. Of course, this was nothing to destroy my relationship with Bobby, but it was something that was well worth keeping in mind.

WHITE: As early as '58, when Kennedy was running himself in Massachusetts, you were aware that he was going for the presidency and that the Kennedys were interested in other campaigns across the country. Can you tell me more about that?

SALINGER: I remember in '58 I got a call from Don Bradley [Don L. Bradley] who was running the campaign for Clair Engle. They needed some

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money. He asked me if I could talk to the Kennedy about getting some money. I talked to Bobby. Here, I am not exactly clear, but I can check it very easily. As I recall, Bobby suggested that I talk to the Senator himself about this one. He had said that he would make a contribution to Clair Engle. He was going to be out on the coast several weeks later. Don later told me that he gave Engle directly some cash. I believe it was \$2,500, which was certainly an indication that he was interested beyond the borders of Massachusetts.

WHITE: He already had that national view of what was coming up. Let me take you now back to where you were before. I just wanted to move that one off my mind. You were there at the Hyannis Port meeting Thanksgiving weekend of 1959, were you not?

SALINGER: I was.

WHITE: Yes. I have spoken to you about that. We don't want to go over the whole meeting because that has been done in great detail and will be done in this series in great detail. Overall, what is the chief impression you remember of that meeting? Of Kennedy himself?

SALINGER: The chief impression that I got of that meeting was the

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very businesslike quality of the meeting, and the fact that a lot of groundwork had been laid that even I was not aware of at that point. The principal people involved in that meeting, as I recall, were Larry O'Brien and Ken O'Donnell, both of whom had been checking around the country extensively and were able to report back in some detail on the situation in the states. That meeting was aimed at carving up the nation for a very precise approach with only one thing in mind and that was the gaining of delegates.

WHITE: At this meeting was there any discussion of what's the.... Let me state this obliquely. Hubert [Hubert H. Humphrey] used to complain to me during

the campaign of 1960. “There’s Kennedy. He’s on the cover of the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Time* magazine, or *Life* magazine. He’s on the cover of all the family magazines. He’s getting the best coverage. I appear in *Photoplay*. He’s got the family magazines and the class magazines. I don’t know how he does it. I get into *Photoplay* and he gets into *Life*.”

SALINGER: I’d like to say that I had a role in getting him on the fronts of all of those magazines, but that’s not the fact

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at all. The fact of the matter is that John F. Kennedy, after the 1956 Democratic Convention, was the freshest, most interesting political personality in the United States in much the same way that Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] and Bobby are today, Teddy more so than Bobby. Ninety percent of the cover stories were stories that were originated by the magazines themselves who came to John Kennedy and said, “We’d like to do a story about you, we’d like to do a story about Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], we’d like to do a story about Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy],” (who was born at that time). It was not originated at all by our people.

WHITE: At this strategy conference in Hyannis Port, there is no discussion of the strategy of the press, of public relations? None like that?

SALINGER: None whatever.

WHITE: Okay. All right. I’ll go back to where we were before. Those were a bad few months until you finally....

SALINGER: I began to feel I was getting some kind of a breakthrough in December. We talked a little more often. It was either New Year’s Eve or the day after New Year’s Eve when I was home and got a phone call from John F.

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Kennedy. It passed beyond the stage of just calling up to find out what was going on in a specific problem. He started to talk about how I saw the campaign.

WHITE: It was on the phone.

SALINGER: On the phone.

WHITE: On the phone. Yes.

SALINGER: We were planning his announcement. We’d had a goof about the announcement. We had decided to send out letters to something like

twenty thousand Democrats telling them that, “I am going today to announce...” You know, one of those letters. Some newspaperman, who was intelligent, had gone down to the robo-type rooms in the Senate, had stolen one of these letters, printed it, and used it as an indication that Kennedy was going to be a candidate for president. We had wanted to hold the announcement so we had said that it was a terrible mistake. It was a very funny story at the time.

I had this discussion with him which seemed to me, personally—I mean, it may have been very subjective—that I had made a breakthrough with John F. Kennedy and

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arrived at the same point maybe that I had with Bobby, although it took me a great deal less time to get to that point with Bobby than it did John F. Kennedy.

Of course, the announcement came. It was the second of January. We plunged right into the New Hampshire primary.

WHITE: Which was easy.

SALINGER: Which was easy. We were running against the ballpoint pen manufacturer with whom I had had dinner the other night who now lives here. Then came Wisconsin, which was not easy.

WHITE: All right. Now you are getting into what I'd call the techniques of the campaign, the episodes of the campaign; Wisconsin, West Virginia, et cetera. Let me bring you back to.... There's something here about either a rapport between you and Kennedy or the way Kennedy uses people. You were now entering Wisconsin. It was a major drive for the presidency. Had he ever talked to you about the grand strategy beyond delegates? Had he ever told you what he wanted you to do in the way of publicity, promotion, anything? Had he ever defined the job for you?

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SALINGER: He hadn't defined the job. By the time we got to talk about the New Hampshire primary and on, we did have a great many discussions about the specifics, in other words, things he wanted done in the way of specific public relations efforts, specific stories to get out, specific things to do, but not, I would say, an overall strategy aimed at any long-term purpose.

You know, when you look back on the campaign, it becomes such a blur. Primaries are no different than anything else. It was a case of moving us always along from one city to another. My job during this time was to bring along a press which was always difficult at best, and to try not to lose too many of them along the road. By funny coincidence, we lost the same guy twice, Ken Frye, the political editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*, who I might add, was very unfriendly to Kennedy. We didn't lose him on purpose. It was just.... I think he thought it was on purpose. Twice the buses moved away, leaving him in some obscure city in Wisconsin during a snow storm.

The whole objective, at least the policy that I had

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created and which I think that the President went along with, was.... I said to him that I thought the most effective thing that I could do was to create a climate for the reporters who were covering his campaign and to make it as easy as possible for them to cover the campaign, as happy and as easy. That was the objective of my policy which was limited in the primary by financial and by other considerations. But in the general election we carried out almost everything that I had wanted to do including such things as the instant transcripts.

WHITE: Which was a new development in politics.

SALINGER: A new development in politics which we threw in.

WHITE: We'll get to that in just a few minutes.

SALINGER: I didn't want to get into the story. This was the objective of my policy and then we had a base to put against that policy.

We had several problems. First of all, if we put out a text for the Senator, ninety-five percent of the time he wouldn't use it, which would infuriate the reporters. They would put out a story based on a speech

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that we had released. Then, the Senator would give a speech and he wouldn't say a word about it. He wouldn't even mention it. We then developed the policy of putting out maybe one or two pages and he would make good on those two pages, and then he would ramble. He liked to speak extemporaneously and did better at it.

WHITE: Pierre, did he realize this from the very beginning?

SALINGER: No. He didn't. It took a while for him to realize this. He knew he was better extemporaneously. It took him a while to realize the ill will we were creating by putting out speeches which he didn't use.

WHITE: You would transmit this feeling to him?

SALINGER: Yes. He got a lot more sophisticated about it as we went along. He would say to me, "Now got talk to the boys and find out what it is in the speech they particularly like and I'll make that good. I'll tell them it is all good, but I'll be sure and say that." I'd go around to the AP [Associated Press] and UP [United Press International] guys and I'd say, "What's your lead on this story?" Then, I'd communicate that back to him. They that would always be in the

speech. He'd make sure that their lead stood up. Of course, he was a great technician in this business in addition to understanding it. I remember one time when he practically knocked Henry Luce [Henry R. Luce] out of his chair. Henry Luce walked in his office one day. Kennedy said to him, "I see Otto Fuerbringer has gotten well and has gone back to work." Fuerbringer had been out for six weeks sick and it happened that he had come back to work the issues before. Kennedy understood *Time* magazine so well. He knew Fuerbringer so well that he hated him. He could tell the difference between *Time* when Fuerbringer was not there and when he was there.

WHITE: How about.... I think I have mentioned this to you before. He could remember every paper from the *Lowell Sun* to the *Berkshire Eagle*—what they did and where they were. He already had that before you got there, didn't he?

SALINGER: He knew more about the press than any man I've ever—than I did from a political standpoint. Of course, the reason you mention the *Lowell Sun* and the *Berkshire Eagle* is because he had that classic story he always used

to tell. In the '52 election when he was running for Senate, Paul Dever [Paul A. Dever] was running for governor, Stevenson was running for president. There were three papers, the *Berkshire Eagle*, the *Lowell Sun*, and the paper out on the Cape, the *Standard Times* of New Bedford. The New Bedford *Standard Times* was for him but against Stevenson and Dever. He carried the area. The *Berkshire Eagle* was for Stevenson and against Kennedy and Dever. The third paper, the *Lowell Sun*, was for Dever and against the two of them.

WHITE: All right. He had now, as you come into him, a national reading of the press also. Is he aware of the *Milwaukee Journal* at this point?

SALINGER: Very much so.

WHITE: And of the *Charlotte Gazette*? And the *Chicago Daily Sun-Times*? And the *Los Angeles Times*?

SALINGER: Very much.

WHITE: He's aware of the relative weights and importances?

SALINGER: Very much so. I think where I probably played some role in the education or in changing his.... He had a lot of friends in the newspaper business like Bill Kent,

Bill Lawrence [William H. Lawrence], Joe Alsop [Joseph W. Alsop], Rowland Evans [Rowland Evans, Jr.], a fellow from the *Herald Tribune*, who were all friends. The one thing that I said to him was that, as a basic thing, he ought to concentrate on making friends with the guys who work for the wire services and the networks.

WHITE: You said that?

SALINGER: Yes. I believe that they control what people in the United States think, not the guys who write for the *New York Times*. As much as I admire the *New York Times*, the percentage of the American population who read the *New York Times* is infinitesimal compared to the number of people who read the AP and the UP or listen to Cronkite [Walter Cronkite] or to Huntley-Brinkley [Chester Robert Huntley; David Brinkley] or whoever is on ABC.

WHITE: You still feel that way?

SALINGER: Very much.

WHITE: My feelings, of course—if I may interject something in this—is that the guys who write the AP and UP stuff read the *New York Times* and then they are colored by what the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine write.

SALINGER: I don't agree with that at all.

WHITE: Okay. May I interrupt here? In connection with Rollie

Evans, Joe Alsop, et cetera, Kennedy was a guy who really enjoyed being with newspaper people. The first time I met him was in '54. I was going to have lunch with him alone. He had Lenny Bernstein [Leonard Bernstein], Jackie, and me for lunch, all together. He enjoyed being with press people.

Let's get this down on record because it must have been a problem for you.... So far as I know his friends in the press were Ben Bradlee [Benjamin C. Bradlee]...

SALINGER: Ben Bradlee, Charlie Bartlett [Charles Bartlett], Joe Alsop, Phil Graham [Philip Leslie Graham], Rollie Evans, to a lesser extent.

WHITE: Yes. Walter Lippmann wasn't on the social front of his?

SALINGER: Not at all.

WHITE: He kept Walter at arm's length and that was the best way.

SALINGER: And he kept Scotty Reston [James B. Reston] too.

WHITE: Scotty Reston too. I remember one night in Wisconsin when—I don't know whether you were there. You were out of town or something—or maybe you were there—when Bill Walton [William Walton], John Bailey [John Moran Bailey], Bobby, Ethel, Jack, Jackie, I and a guy called Albert Ravenhope were there. Doris Fleeson walks in. He said, "John, pay this check from the Connecticut campaign fund. I've got to get out of here

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before Doris Fleeson notices that I'm in the corner. I don't want to talk to her." He had friends and people that he just didn't want to see at all.

SALINGER: Well, going back to friends for a minute, you said that it was a problem and it could have been a problem. I resolved that here was a man who had developed these friendships over a long period of time. There were only two ways I could go with this particular situation. One was to say, "All right, you've got to channel these things through me or you're going to cut off my effectiveness off with the rest of the press." Or else take the approach that I did take and that was to say to the press, "Look, these guys were friends of his long before I met him and I'm not going to stick my nose into who his friends are." That's just a fact of life, which is the way I decided to go on it. I will say that none of them, with one exception, ever took advantage of him. Charlie Bartlett became so dull during the administration of John F. Kennedy because he never wrote anything. He wrote the dullest stuff.

WHITE: That's true of Joe Alsop also.

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SALINGER: Joe Alsop never wrote anything dull, but never took advantage of him.

WHITE: Never took advantage of him. We'll skip the....

SALINGER: Well, I got it in the book.

WHITE: We can skip it.

SALINGER: There is one guy that took shameful advantage of him all the time.

WHITE: You mean [REDACTED]?

SALINGER: I do. He was reproached by the President time after time, and he would

say he was sorry and was going to come back. Then, the same thing would happen all over again.

WHITE: Let me take you now through the technical episodes of the this campaign and what you want to add. The three technical episodes I want to get before I get to the.... I want to get Wisconsin, which I think is recorded, West Virginia, the Convention and the debates. Let's do that, of which the Convention is the most important. After that I want to do two philosophical things with you. One is his Catholicism, and the second is his visceral relation to Nixon [Richard M. Nixon].

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SALINGER: Well, let's take the Convention...

WHITE: Can we start...

SALINGER: Or Wisconsin. In other words, my operation in these primaries was considerably different, one from the other. In Wisconsin I traveled with him. We had people who were anchored in Milwaukee who worked on the spread out of the press information of the newspapers in Wisconsin. We were getting out two or three releases a day throughout the state.

We really had two different campaigns in Wisconsin. We had the out-state campaign and the Milwaukee campaign. The Milwaukee campaign was keyed to the minority groups, to the Polish groups, to the German groups, to the various so-called eastern European groups. Also there was a Catholic connotation to the campaign in Milwaukee, which was the Catholic stronghold in Wisconsin. The out-state campaign was an entirely different campaign.

WHITE: Who is responsible for this? I didn't know this now.

SALINGER: I would say that Bobby was the strategist.

WHITE: Has Bobby got that kind of thinking in him?

SALINGER: Oh, yes. Very much so. Of course,

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Lou Harris [Louis Harris] was giving us some information during that time. The polls were taken very extensively. I will say that Lou Harris, probably, by making a critical mistake in Wisconsin, helped John F. Kennedy to become president. Lou Harris' polls in Wisconsin were very bad and forced us into a very bad mistake. If we had not made that mistake, Kennedy would have won that state by 7 to 3 instead of 6 to 4. If he had won the state by 7 to 3, Humphrey would not have run in West Virginia. If Humphrey had not run in West Virginia, he would never have had the

confrontation based on the Catholic issue. There was a poll run about two days before the election. Harris said that Kennedy had a chance to win the third and tenth district.

WHITE: The tenth he had no chance in.

SALINGER: So, as I recall, the last day was spent running around Superior, Wisconsin, and up in that area. As the election turned out, we never had a chance to win either of those, the third or the tenth. We could have won the second, Madison, which we lost by under a thousand votes.

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WHITE: Under a thousand. Yes. That was the Adlai Stevenson-Ivan Nestingen [Ivan A. Nestingen] district.

SALINGER: Right. Under a thousand votes. We could have won it by going back in there.

WHITE: May I take you back, though, to something you said here because I thought I knew all about that campaign. I wasn't aware of this breakdown into a Milwaukee campaign and an out-state campaign. I used to talk to him rather casually about ethnics. Was he that precise in his planning and knowledge?

SALINGER: The Wisconsin campaign was very precise.

WHITE: Were you ever in a session where you heard him talk about this sort of stuff?

SALINGER: No. I was not. I was around the headquarters and I knew the way this campaign was keyed. They were vitally aware of the fact that Milwaukee presented a much different problem than did the out-state. The campaign in Milwaukee was a different kind of campaign.

You asked specifically. I couldn't put my finger on a specific thing at this moment except to say that I remember that it was a different campaign. It was keyed

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differently. The speeches were different. I believe the mailers were different. I can look back....

WHITE: How about access now to the candidate at that time? He was running both for president and in a primary in Wisconsin. You would control the newspapermen assigned.

SALINGER: Never had an access problem.

WHITE: Did you decide who sought him?

SALINGER: Not always. No.

WHITE: Or did he himself know that he had to give at least half his time to talk to Wisconsin newspapermen?

SALINGER: I would recommend to him whom he should see, but then there were people that would get to him through other channels that he would see also. You know they would get to him through Bobby or Steve or some of his friends. But, as a matter of fact, he was keenly aware of the fact that we had to keep the Wisconsin newspapers, that they had to have their part of it. So, he would see them. We would do a lot of specialized radio and TV stuff for the Wisconsin stations. In addition to that, he would see the traveling press when there was something special. But that was the case all over.

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I think you can write that down—was true in every primary, in fact, in the whole election. It was one where the access was always very good. A key to his whole operation was the fact that you could see him.

WHITE: It was not quite the key because Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] is in many ways more accessible than Kennedy.

SALINGER: No, he's not.

WHITE: He spends more time with newspapermen.

SALINGER: Yes, but in a much different way.

WHITE: Much different way. Yes. He doesn't respect them.

SALINGER: Well. There's a very, very clear difference. The difference is that Kennedy listened to the questions and tried to answer them, and Johnson gives a monologue. In other words, when a newspaperman goes to interview Johnson for an hour, he may end up listening to Johnson's speech fifty-nine minutes on a subject which he doesn't give a goddamn about and ask him one question.

WHITE: That's the old Rooseveltian [Franklin D. Roosevelt] technique.

SALINGER: Yes.

WHITE: Let me give you my chief memory of Wisconsin and you

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respond to it. You arranged for me to be present that night with him in his room when he got the returns. He was very, very buoyant that night as he expected the returns, and he was very, very bitter that night after the returns came in. When he left Wisconsin for West Virginia and when he campaigned in West Virginia, he was a much more intense man, a much more serious guy. Is this just my impression or do you feel there was a change in the rhythm of the campaign?

SALINGER: Again, there was a.... When I say Harris trapped us in Wisconsin, he also trapped us in....

WHITE: Well, he sure trapped you in West Virginia. By God I....

SALINGER: He double-trapped us.

WHITE: He told you that you were 70/30.

SALINGER: We went to West Virginia thinking we were ahead 70/30 and found out the day after that we were behind 70/30. That was, of course, produced by the single addition of a single word to his poll. Harris had neglected to tell the people in West Virginia in his first poll that John F. Kennedy was a Catholic. In

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the second poll when they found out he was a Catholic, it put us behind 70/30. So we were right up against it there. If we had lost in West Virginia, we were gone. So the whole campaign strategy changed in West Virginia, at least, as far as I was concerned. The press operations...

WHITE: Let me hold you here. I want to change this tape, but I want to get you on the change of strategy because it was in West Virginia somehow that Kennedy really grew both as a man and in terms of....

SALINGER: Well, a lot of things happened to him in West Virginia. Personally...

WHITE: Let me hold this and change it.

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[BEGIN TAPE 2]

WHITE: This is July 19, 1965, in Los Angeles. I am recording with Pierre Salinger. I remember Kennedy was as gay as he could be in Wisconsin that night.

Wisconsin was a real victory for him. He was right over the border from Hubert. He clobbered Hubert. Hell, I think he got fifty-seven percent of the vote, which is a landslide, for Christ's sake, in Hubert's backyard. But because of the press setup, it looked like a defeat.

SALINGER: I remember the day after the Wisconsin primary. He called me in the room. It was apparent to him that the press had interpreted the Wisconsin primary as a defeat for him which it was not, as you pointed out. John Bailey had done a great many figures. Lou Harris had analyzed the thing. I invited about twenty newspapermen to my room at the hotel. The whole purpose of the exercise was for John Bailey, Lou Harris, and me to sit down and explain to them why John Kennedy really won the primary in Wisconsin. That was pretty much of a lost cause by then because the line had gone out from Wisconsin that Kennedy had not won a decisive victory. I lay part of the blame on Ed Bayley [Edwin R. Bayley].

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WHITE: John Bailey.

SALINGER: Ed Bayley of Gaylord Nelson's staff.

WHITE: Right.

SALINGER: He was the press secretary for Gaylord Nelson. He was a definite Humphrey supporter. He had spent the whole campaign briefing newsmen in Madison who had come to visit him that we were going to win the election ten to one.

WHITE: He told me that.

SALINGER: He told that to a number of people. When we won it six to four, it looked as if we had gotten beaten. We won, but we lost. Then we were in West Virginia. In West Virginia we had gone in with the expectation of an easy win and we found ourselves in a very bad underdog position. It was a must win; we had to win the election.

WHITE: Let me interject here. Remember where you are. We are recording with Nicole Salinger and Nancy White here. (Aside to them) This is what we are trying somehow to arrive at this evening. Politics depends either upon clout—you can put a gun behind somebody—or upon response—can you make them want you? The whole

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business in politics is to peacefully make them want you to lead. Not only that, but it is how the press in this country judges response because response is not pure—what the people respond to and how the press says that they respond. It's a very, very difficult thing.

Kennedy had won a victory in Wisconsin of massive proportion. I would say that Kennedy won by more than your General de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle] will win by in this presidential election. In Wisconsin, it was considered a defeat. Now, he has to go to West Virginia which is a state in which there are five percent Catholics and ninety-five percent Protestants. Pierre, carry on.

SALINGER: We evolved a strategy that was along three or four lines. Number one, we had to meet the Catholic issue head-on. We decided to do that in West Virginia. We did not evolve our way of doing it in the early part of the campaign. As the campaign progressed and it became more and more evident that the Catholic issue was cutting us hard, the idea was evolved for an interview in which the interviewer would be a man who was the son of probably

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the most popular politician in West Virginia history, Franklin Roosevelt—his son, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.], interviewing the President, in which the question of religion and anti-Catholicism was interjected.

The second basic strategy was a psychological strategy; that is, let West Virginia play a role in selecting the next president of the United States. If Hubert Humphrey wins the West Virginia primary, he will never receive the nomination of the Democratic Party. Therefore, you are throwing your vote away. If John F. Kennedy wins the West Virginia primary, you will have selected the next president of the United States.

WHITE: Who would be in a strategy session like this, Pierre? Who would have been there? Were you there?

SALINGER: Larry O'Brien, Ken O'Donnell, Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], Ralph Dungan, Bobby. We had the whole team in West Virginia.

WHITE: Yes. You would sit in on this thing? Yes.

SALINGER: Yes. This is what we were trying to push. It didn't make any difference if Hubert Humphrey wanted West Virginia. The people in West Virginia were throwing their votes away by voting for Hubert Humphrey. During

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the West Virginia primary...

WHITE: What would be his reaction to a thing like? Would he lead a discussion like this or listen to you people talk about it?

[Interruption]

SALINGER: He was on the road. As far as the press operation was concerned, it changed too. Chuck Roche [Charles D. Roche] went on the road for the Senator in West Virginia and I stayed back in Charleston with Bobby, Larry, Ralph, Ted Sorensen, and Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman]. Kenny was on the road. We worked on strategy there. I was putting out speeches, not only statements for the President, but we had a doctor, an osteopath, who was our chairman in West Virginia. I would put out a statement a day in his name which was an attack on Hubert Humphrey on some grounds or other. We were evolving this general strategy of the campaign from this hotel.

Two things happened in West Virginia. First of all, I believe West Virginia brought a real transformation of John F. Kennedy as a person. He came into contact, really, for the first time with poverty. He saw what had happened as a result of the technological

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changes in coal mining. He saw hundred of people sitting around the city with nothing to do—really, in a way, running sands of coal through their hands, with nothing to do. It affected him very deeply. It really, in my opinion, changed his whole outlook on life. In fact, the primaries changed his outlook. A lot of people criticize the primaries. I think the...

WHITE: I don't.

SALINGER: I think the primaries are an absolute essential to the education of a president of the United States because they take him from the very narrow perimeter of his own life, surroundings, and environment into the country which is so vast that very few people ever get to know it. For John Kennedy who was born and raised in some wealth in Massachusetts to suddenly see the life of West Virginia was, in my opinion, the thing that produced Executive Order Number One on January 20, 1961, which was an executive order for additional food stamps for hungry people. This transformation came through for the people of West Virginia, I think, more than anything. You take the Catholic issue, you take the

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the fact that we were running the campaign there as if you were running a campaign to elect a ward leader in New York or Chicago. We whipped this campaign down to the sheriffs, the district attorneys, and the councilmen because this is the way you win elections in West Virginia. An entirely different campaign than in Wisconsin. You take all those facts into account, that you had an immensely popular son of an immensely popular president campaigning through the state. Nevertheless, the fact that Kennedy cared came through in West Virginia more clearly than it had in any other state in which he campaigned. It won the election for him there. It is amazing when you think of going from 70/30 behind and then winning the election 60/40. Nobody expected him to win the election by that. I think by

election day we expected him to win 51/49, 52/48, and then he won 60/40. That was the key to it, as far as I was concerned.

Also, I think the strategy of kissing Humphrey off as a hopeless presidential candidate was effective in West Virginia. West Virginia, which was the fiftieth

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state in the union in defense contracts, wanted to be with a winner who would remember West Virginia. John F. Kennedy sold West Virginia on the fact that if he became president he would never forget West Virginia. They had made him president. He would remember them.

WHITE: As I remember that night, you were in Charleston and he was in Washington.

SALINGER: The night of the election.

WHITE: That's right. Bobby called him. He came down. Did you go back with him that night?

SALINGER: I did.

WHITE: What was his reaction?

SALINGER: Well, he was elated. He knew he had been nominated.

WHITE: When John F. Kennedy was elated, what does that mean? Tell me about that.

SALINGER: He was loose on the way back. He was relaxed; he was in good humor; he was telling jokes. You knew when he was. It was really a question of his own outward manifestation. But he knew that night that he had gotten the nomination. The funny thing about it was that he always knew he was going to get it. I don't

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think he ever had the slightest doubt about it.

I never had the slightest doubt since the first day I heard him give a speech. I heard him give a speech in Wisconsin in September, 1959. I remember coming home and saying, "This man is going to be elected president of the United States." I had five or six friends of mine who would all testify that I called them on the phone and said, "This guy is the most remarkable man I've ever heard in my life; he's going to be the president of the United State." They said, "You know, you've been drinking this juice too long. You've been in Washington too long; you've gone out of your mind."

We were in New Hampshire in February. John Bailey and I were having dinner with Pat Morin [Relman G. Morin] who was a very astute political observer who had covered

Kennedy for the first time. I got into an argument with Morin that night, who was a great friend of mine. I said, "You know, Pat, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you a hundred dollars even that Kennedy is nominated on the first ballot." Morin said, "You're out of your

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mind. You're just giving the money away." And Bailey said, "I'll take half the action."

WHITE: On your side?

SALINGER: On my side. So Morin said, "Okay. I'll take that bet." I didn't intend it as a psychological bet to influence the way he wrote. That was not the reason I had in mind at all, but it worked that way. As he later told me, he walked away from that evening and said, "If these two bastards want to bet a hundred dollars even money that he's going to get the nomination on the first ballot, they must really know what they're doing." But we are getting away from West Virginia.

WHITE: The way I heard the story was that it was Ted Sorensen who told them to hit the Catholic issue head-on. He knew at this point he had to hit it. Was it Ted alone? Was it his decision? I'm trying to get into the decision-making process of Kennedy at a very early stage before we get on to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

SALINGER: I'm in much better shape to tell you about the Cuban Missile Crisis. Still, when you go back to the primaries, guys were running around. I was phoning Bobby and Bobby

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was phoning me. We were having little meetings. Ted was here. I can't tell you. I think that everybody felt that the Catholic issue was a big issue right from the beginning in West Virginia. I have to be frank. I can't tell you the exact decision that brought around the television show involving Franklin Roosevelt. It was most effective; terrifically effective TV show. We liked that format so well that we used it later about six times in Oregon which was not an easy primary.

WHITE: I didn't cover that one. You used it right down to election eve when you had Luther Hodges [Luther H. Hodges] come up to ask questions in Manchester, New Hampshire. All right. So much for West Virginia. Get me into a close focus on Kennedy. By this time you had gotten to know him very well in West Virginia. At the Convention you knock off Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams], Dick Daley [Richard J. Daley] was in the bag, you picked up the New York delegates coming in. You were coming into Los Angeles. I met you at the airport. He was coming into the Convention in Los Angeles. You had been a tourist in the 1956 convention; at the 1960 convention you were a critical factor. Did you see him for any long

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conversations? At this point it seems to me as if you were describing your relationship with him as one basically of rhythmic rapport—you were on the same wavelength. Do you remember any long conversation with him before coming into the Convention room?

SALINGER: I had no long conversation with him.

WHITE: Because here he was turning over.

SALINGER: I had no long conversation with him. We never had long philosophical conversations. We had long conversations about...

WHITE: All right. You were coming into a big convention at Los Angeles at this time in 1960, and here was a kid called Salinger who had been a tourist at one convention and had never run a convention before. You had to run these press relations. Did he give you any instructions?

SALINGER: No. I worked out a memorandum of what I thought should be done at the Convention. First of all, you have to remember that I went to Los Angeles three weeks to a month before he did.

WHITE: Larry came early too, didn't he?

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SALINGER: Larry, I, and a fellow named Bobby Troutman [Robert Troutman, Jr.].

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: We set up the operations in Los Angeles. I set up the press operations. I decided that we should do something different. The major new thing that we were going to do at this convention was to put out a daily newspaper of our own which was going to be an impartial newspaper; at least, it would give the appearance of being an impartial newspaper, but would have just enough of a Kennedy edge in it so that it would be worthwhile for us to put it out. Kennedy thought it was a good idea, but he didn't want to spend a lot of money on it. I told him that I could put out the whole newspaper for under \$5,000 for the entire Convention. I think it actually ended up about \$3,000, the cost of printing. I put together a staff for that paper. One of those people on it got paid, and that was in fact my brother, who came down Napa Valley, one of the editors of the [unclear]. You remember "Fiddle and Faddle" [Jill Cowan; Priscilla Wear]?

WHITE: Yes.

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SALINGER: They worked on the paper.

WHITE: This is the first time you mentioned money. Would you discuss money with him? Was he aware of the value of money?

SALINGER: Very much aware of the value of money, although we never really got into a discussion of it. I knew there were no unnecessary expenses involved.

WHITE: When you said that it'd come to less than \$5,000, I imagine he must have snapped his fingers and said, "Okay, go." There was a general impression that he was so rich and had so much dough that he didn't care what was spent where or how.

SALINGER: We watched the dollar very carefully because...

WHITE: He had Steve always...

SALINGER: He cared, in fact, he cared more than anybody. I remember talking to him about money a lot of times and I remember talking to him about money at the White House. Everybody thought he had it made at the White House. He would be looking over bills that he had gotten for entertainment the previous month and found that he would have to write a personal check for \$2,000 because the government expense

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account didn't cover it. He'd be complaining bitterly about the amount of booze that had been consumed and would give orders to the butlers at the White House not to open bottles of champagne until the last one was finished. "Don't have five open at the same time. Don't go out filling guys' glasses when they are half-full," and things like that.

WHITE: I think we have a social comment over here, Pierre.

SALINGER: It's just like Johnson now.

WHITE: So we come to the Convention. As I get it now, the relationship between you and Kennedy is something like catching the rhythm, but there are no long skull sessions of how you handle the press at the Convention.

SALINGER: Right. I talked to him on the phone once a day while I was at Los Angeles. I think, as a substantive thing, the major discussion that we had was a strategy discussion. It seemed to me once we had the votes to win the nomination—I knew we had them about ten days before. Larry had been working with the

California people. I called Kennedy and said, "Look, what we've got to do is understate our vote when you arrive in

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Los Angeles and exclude certain states where we know what the vote is. For example, we've got 600 votes exclusive of Ohio, California, New York, Delaware, and maybe one other state. Always give ourselves room to build; always give ourselves room to accumulate the loss of a few delegates who might bolt during the Convention and never go backward one vote in the 600 figure." He always accepted that fact. And that is the way we were able to absorb.... There was one day when we had the defection of about twenty votes.

WHITE: Where? From California?

SALINGER: No. I never counted California in it. That was Delaware, the District of Columbia or something. Somebody came out and said you've lost twelve votes—at that point California came through with forty votes—or somebody would come in and say, "You only got forty votes and you were supposed to get sixty votes in California." I'd say, "Look at the statement I put out two days ago. We didn't even count California in that. This is forty plus, not minus twenty." That was the whole philosophy—to add, never subtract.

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WHITE: Let me ask you one that came up at the Convention at that time which you probably have forgotten. It seems so trivial to you, but to me, coming into it, it was very important. I had come in from New York and had been called up by a doctor friend of mine on Addison's disease. At that time practically all the doctors in New York were Stevenson fans. The word was out strong that Kennedy was mortally ill, that he lived on cortisone injections. You remember this?

SALINGER: Very well.

WHITE: This was a big, big thing coming into Los Angeles of John F. Kennedy. There were pictures of him. Do you remember those pictures of the flabby jowls which were...

SALINGER: John Connally.

WHITE: You lanced that.

SALINGER: John Connally and India Edwards held a joint press conference in which they said that John F. Kennedy had Addison's disease. It was decided that

the Senator himself wouldn't dignify the press conference by giving a response. I had put out a statement for the doctor in which it was categorically denied that he had Addison's

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disease. Of course, this was a rumor that had gone through all the period of the time that I had known him, which persisted all during his presidency, and which would come up every once and a while. The fact of the matter is that he did have a deficiency which some doctors would diagnose as Addison's disease, but which the doctors who were caring for him would say was not Addison's disease. In other words, it was similar in character.

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: But it was not Addison's disease. It was not fatal; it was not going to be fatal; it was under control; it had always been under control; it was going to stay under control. I don't remember that it had any...

WHITE: Did you talk to him about this yourself?

SALINGER: Yes, I did.

WHITE: What did he say? What did you say to him that he said?

SALINGER: I can't tell you the exact conversation, but I remember telling him that he had been accused of having Addison's disease. And he said, "I don't have Addison's disease." I said, "You're accused of taking cortisone." And he said, "Well, I don't take cortisone. I did take

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cortisone, but I don't take it any more." Then he suggested that I call a certain doctor that I'll leave out of this. The doctor filled me in on the details of the thing. We got together a statement and put it out.

There were several things that happened at the Convention which were rather interesting. One of them was the day of the so-called Kennedy-Johnson debate.

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: Johnson had sent an invitation to Kennedy to appear before the Texas delegation. We seized on the opportunity to push it into a debate situation. Then, there began to be some hedging from Johnson's side as to whether Kennedy should really come down to the Texas delegation. I started backgrounding the press in very sharp terms about Johnson—how he didn't have any guts, how he really didn't want to face Kennedy—that this was really the collapse of the Johnson movement. I was really

digging at Johnson pretty hard. I got a phone call. I heard the voice on the other end of the line say, "Young man, this is Phil Graham." I had never met Phil Graham before in my life.

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WHITE: Really? Did he call you "young man?"

SALINGER: Yes.

WHITE: Go ahead.

SALINGER: And he said, "I just want to say one thing to you. Don't tear something apart in such a way that you can never put it back together again." I said, "Okay," and hung up the phone. Of course, it immediately dawned on me what he was trying to say to me. It was that there was going to be a Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Therefore, I shouldn't knock Johnson around to the point where....

WHITE: We are now coming to the Johnson thing.

SALINGER: Let me go back a minute because Earl Mazo had come to see me in Washington about two days before I left for the Convention and had asked me who I thought would be the ticket. At that moment I had never speculated on the ticket before because I figured that was not my province. I was just trying to get Kennedy nominated. I said, "The ticket is going to be Kennedy-Johnson." He said, "You're crazy. Why would Johnson take the nomination?" "First," I said, "he's not going to get the presidential nomination, and second, I think, he

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has the type of ego where he developed the reputation of the greatest legislative leader of all times, where he could see the vice presidency as a super-legislative leader; therefore, he could reconcile himself to the idea of becoming the vice presidential candidate." I did it off the top of my head. As it turned out, that was a little bit in the back of Johnson's mind when he took the nomination. To get to the whole thing of the vice presidency...

WHITE: May I stop you for just one second because whatever we say here can be released only at your wish. You carry a certain part of my confidence too. A person very high in Johnson's administration now, called me about five days before the Los Angeles Convention and said, "I think you should know that John Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy are fags." I said, "You're crazy." He said, "We have pictures of John Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy in women's dresses at Las Vegas this spring at a big fag party. This should be made public." I said, "I'll print it if you give me the pictures." He said, "I'll get you the pictures in twenty-four hours."

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He never delivered the pictures to me. But this was a person very high in the present Johnson camp.

SALINGER: This was the Johnson camp?

WHITE: I don't know whether it was the Johnson camp at Los Angeles. It was somebody....

SALINGER: You know Johnson was only...

WHITE: All right.

SALINGER: You don't have to go any further in the Johnson campaign than the India Edwards-John Connally press conference which was about as low a blow as you will ever want to find in American politics.

WHITE: Plus Johnson's own very anti-Catholic statements on—I think it was—Monday or Tuesday evening at the Biltmore Hotel.

SALINGER: I can only tell you the story of the vice presidency from the direction from which I saw it.

WHITE: Please now go ahead.

SALINGER: I have told you some.

WHITE: You have and you can reclaim, unless you've lost it, the memorandum you wrote to yourself, but never finished.

SALINGER: I'd like to get that back.

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WHITE: You gave me a thermofax which I still have. You were very busy and you never finished it. I'll give you what you gave me in Thermofax if you wish it.

SALINGER: Okay.

WHITE: Go ahead.

SALINGER: As I recall, I got a call from Bobby about a quarter to seven the morning after the nomination. I went up to his room. Ken O'Donnell had just

arrived also. Bobby was in the bathtub. Bobby shouted out of the bathtub to me to get a book and compute the number of electoral votes there were in the South plus the northeast states. At which point I recall saying to him, "You're not going to do that." He said, "Yes, we are." Thereupon ensued a violent argument between Kenny and I, and Bobby. This is why I can only tell you this side of it. When I read that Bobby was opposed to Johnson's nomination, I know that in this particular discussion he was supporting the idea. Both Kenny and I had been violently opposed to the idea of Johnson getting the nomination. We were for Stuart Symington [Stuart Symington II]. I think we both finally left the room thoroughly satisfied—*fait accompli*—

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that there was nothing we could do about it.

I later went to Kennedy's suite. It was full of fellows like DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio], Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence], Reuther, Stevenson, John Bailey, and Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff]. All were a part of the exercise of convincing these guys who were dubious about it that Johnson would be a good nominee for vice president. Then, I recall I got a call saying the deal had been made and that Lawrence was going to nominate Johnson.

WHITE: Do you remember at what time?

SALINGER: Here I just can't quite recall if I was in my own room by then or if I was up in the suite with him when the word came. But, either way I got up in the suite right away because we had to go down to the room and make the statement. I'd say that it was about 2:30 p.m. I think that we were probably in the room forty-five minutes or an hour before we went down to the ballroom.

There was never any doubt in my mind after 8:30 a.m. that Johnson was going to be the nominee. Now I was not in on some of this.

WHITE: Now, the story I get, Pierre, the story I hear is that Kennedy decided about 1:00, 1:30 in the afternoon that

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he had made a mistake, and sent Bobby downstairs to tell Johnson that he was shifting signals. Do you believe this is a true story?

SALINGER: I did not see anything personally that would indicate this as a true story or not. I have no way of judging it. From the time I saw Bobby in the morning through the time when Kennedy went down and made the statement, I didn't see anything that would indicate other than Johnson for the nomination except some furious negotiations with some of the great so-called city bosses, for example, Daley, Lawrence, or people like that.

WHITE: Did you see him? You know Arthur Schlesinger's [Arthur M. Schlesinger,

Jr.] story?

SALINGER: The one in the recent *Life* magazine?

WHITE: The one in the recent *Life* magazine.

SALINGER: I must say that I did hear some things at the time which indicated that the Senator had offered the nomination to Johnson, feeling that he would not accept it. That I had heard; that I had heard at the time.

WHITE: I heard that that day.

SALINGER: But as far as...

WHITE: Let's put this on the record please. I was coming upstairs—

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it must have been 6 p.m.—with Bobby. I said, “Jesus Christ, I didn't realize that you really wanted Lyndon.” He said something like, “How do you operate with Lyndon?” I was with Ed Morgan [Edward P. Morgan]. We were both walking down the corridor in that eighth floor. Bobby said, “We offered it to him, but we never thought he'd accept it.” I remember that because Ed and I were together.

SALINGER: I can believe that from some of the things I heard at the time. I do remember either Bobby or John F. Kennedy saying to me at one point during that day—this is the one thing I remember clearly—one of them said to me, “Nobody will ever really know how this all came about.” I think it was the Senator who said that to me. I guess I had asked some questions. I wanted to get some background. He said, “Well, I'd just as soon not tell you. I don't think anybody will ever really know how this all really came about.”

WHITE: Did he know you well enough to tell you, “I would just as soon not tell you”?

SALINGER: Oh, yes. He did. Of course, when you get down to the

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Cuban Missile Crisis, you get into a fascinating situation along that line.

WHITE: Yes. Did anybody know all that went on in his mind? Did Bobby?

SALINGER: Well, Bobby came as close to knowing it as anybody. Other than Bobby, I would say Kenny O'Donnell. I think Kenny O'Donnell was probably the

closest man to the President of anybody, a great deal closer than Ted Sorensen ever was, or Larry O'Brien or any of those people. Kenny was almost as close to him as Bobby was.

WHITE: But Kenny came into the President's life the way you did, via Bobby.

SALINGER: Yes. But a great deal longer before I did.

WHITE: When was the first time you saw him alone at Los Angeles after the ticket was decided? After the ticket was decided there was the Friday acceptance speech at the big coliseum down here, a speech which Ted Sorensen wrote. I remember seeing Kenny and Larry for breakfast on Saturday morning and their describing to me how the campaign was going to go. Whatever they had planned that they thought John Kennedy was going to do, he did

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not do after that. When did you first, after the choice of Lyndon Johnson, have a talk with Kennedy because up until then he had been focused entirely on the nomination and not on the presidency? Now his mind shifted...

SALINGER: I saw him briefly with Bobby. It was all on a number of technical things: when he wanted to leave for Boston; whether or not he would want to take the press on the plane; what kind of charter he ought to set up, a number of technical things. Of course, I was in and out of there all the time trying to get him to come out to television stations, individual interviews, and things of that kind.

The first time that I ever talked to him at any length privately after the nomination was in Hyannis. It was a couple of days after we got to Hyannis. As I recall, it coincided with a conversation that he had with Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]. Bowles had come to Hyannis to see him about becoming his advisor on foreign policy for the campaign. The Senator had the impression that Bowles, while he would be effective in this field because he would bring some of the liberals in who thought that

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Bowles was a hell of a fellow, also had his mind firmly planted on being Secretary of State.

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: He was going to use the position to put himself in such a position that it would be very difficult not to give him Secretary of State. Kennedy wanted to avoid being put in that position. Either this conversation or the next conversation also centered around the telegram that we had received from Bob Kintner [Robert E. Kintner, NBC].

WHITE: I don't know about this.

SALINGER: In which Kintner.... This would have been about three, four days after our convention and the beginning of the Republican convention when Kintner had offered seven, eight, or nine hours of television time for a debate between Nixon and Kennedy. I think that Leonard Reinsch [J. Leonard Reinsch] was there at the time. I know the decision was made in fifteen or twenty minutes that we should send a telegram to Kintner saying that we accepted. The feeling was that we had absolutely nothing to lose by a debate with Nixon. If we accepted right away, we would put Nixon in a position where he had to accept.

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Everybody just felt that the debate would be most helpful to Kennedy.

WHITE: Let me break your pace right now a little bit because I don't want to get into the debate too quickly. I want to ask you what I call two philosophical questions: one is about Catholicism, and the other is about the presidency. Did you ever talk to him about being a Catholic? I don't mean in terms of the Catholic vote in St. Paul, or the Catholic votes in Boston or in Los Angeles.

SALINGER: No. I never had such a discussion with him.

WHITE: All right.

SALINGER: I had such a discussion with Bobby, but never with him.

WHITE: I'll skip Bobby. We'll save that for a later date. We're talking about the President. Now, you mentioned about Chet Bowles being put in charge of this foreign policy task force. Later on you played a role in foreign policy. Did you at any time between convention and debates ever talk to him about America's role in the world? It must have come in on Kennedy very, very hard that all these beautiful things he was saying he was

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going to have to do something about: let's get America moving, America's prestige is dropping in the world.

SALINGER: No. No.

WHITE: I think that I wrote you that the only time he ever got mad at me...

SALINGER: Yes. I read that.

WHITE: ...was on the way back from Montana that night. I said, "Supposing you are elected, where are get going to be eight years from now?" He got very exasperated and mad and didn't answer it. Did you ever ask about that?

SALINGER: Never did.

WHITE: I never felt the need to as the campaign rolled along. I never found him saying anything that I disagreed with particularly during that time.

SALINGER: Okay. There was a little thing over here, a little pivot, that if we could make it, would be good, between a guy running for president, thinking about the Polish vote, the Slav vote in Milwaukee, and the Protestant vote in West Virginia. Then he had to turn and think about how you use the power of America in the outside

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world. Up until he got the nomination, he was mostly interested in how you get the power in the USA [unclear]. At some point when he was nominated he had to think of what he was going to do with this power. Well, can you say...

SALINGER: An incident occurred which materially affected his whole thinking on foreign policy. That was during the middle of the Oregon primary the Russians shot down Francis Gary Powers. I remember at the time that Kennedy was very upset by Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] taking full responsibility for it. He said it was a critical mistake. You remember he made a statement in which he said.... It was later interpreted to mean that he would have apologized to the Russians.

WHITE: Nixon picked him up on it.

SALINGER: Right, but that is not what he said. He said that he would have regretted it. To regret something can mean anything from regret that "they caught him and shot him down," to regret "that I sent him." He had chosen the word, regret, very carefully. We stopped two or three times during that day in Oregon where we were.

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He was trying to find out specifically what had happened. He could not believe that Eisenhower had been stupid enough to admit that he was the guy that had sent him.

WHITE: Let me hold you there. When you say we were in Oregon.... That was one of the minor league ball games of the primary so far as I'm concerned.

SALINGER: There was nobody in Oregon.

WHITE: All right. Who is “we”? You, Kennedy, and Bobby?

SALINGER: Kennedy, Kenny O’Donnell and I, I believe, were the only people in Oregon.

WHITE: And you three discussed that matter of what the president of the United States should do when he’s caught red-handed.

SALINGER: We discussed the matter of what John F. Kennedy, the candidate for the Democratic nomination for the president of the United States, should say when the President was caught red-handed.

WHITE: Can you give me any more vivid.... This is difficult to force you back in memory. This is a very important thing.

SALINGER: I remember that the very thing that came out on it. There had been a thing, and then Kennedy had caught

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up to what was going on. Kennedy had lost his voice, as you recall.

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: He held a couple of press conferences where he couldn’t ever answer the questions, where he had written the answers out on a piece of paper. I had read the answers off to the press. Then this thing occurred. He checked up on it. Then, he had said in this one speech this thing about ‘regretting.’ That had become the cause for liability. In a real sense, we become defensive about it as well as Eisenhower becoming defensive about it. Kennedy never really got in a position of attacking Eisenhower on the thing or he never felt he could attack Eisenhower on it. But he was defending himself against the attacks that he was getting at that time for having suggested that we apologize.

WHITE: I’m trying here to lay the base for what is going to come next on the foreign policy because this business of the use of American power. There has got to be a deal between the Soviet Union and the USA. Either we knock each other out or we...

[-87-]

SALINGER: Well, I said that I think as far as...

WHITE: I can remember Nixon in one speech saying that the president of the United States does not need to send regrets or apologies. Nixon was

hammering him. Kennedy's thing struck me as being correct.

SALINGER: I think it is at that point, though, that he was forced into the arena of foreign policy more than he had been before in the campaign. Of course, the major area where he was forced into the arena of practical foreign policy was in Cuba when he made the speech which Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] wrote. In that speech he said if he were elected president, he would support free Cuban groups to help bring about a return of the Democratic society in Cuba. This was interpreted inside the Eisenhower administration as a tip-off that Kennedy knew about the plan that they already had.

WHITE: Oh, really?

SALINGER: It forced Nixon into the position of denying that the Eisenhower administration had any plans for the invasion of Cuba which, in fact, they did at that time. In fact, not only did they have those plans, but we subsequently learned that Nixon pressed very vigorously inside the

[-88-]

administration for an invasion of Cuba ten days before the election in order to swing the election.

WHITE: Dick Donahue [Richard K. Donahue] told me. I didn't believe it.

SALINGER: It's true. It can be documented.

WHITE: Now, let me bring you up again to where we were, which is the television debates. Perhaps there will never again be debates between presidential candidates. You got a telegraph from Kintner. You discuss it. This is a command decision on the part of Kennedy. When did you first talk about it with Kennedy?

SALINGER: I got the telegram. Then I took the telegram to him. He made an immediate reaction which was something like, "Why not?" or "Let's do it." Then he said that we'd check with Leonard Reinsch. I can't remember whether Leonard Reinsch was there or if I called him on the phone. I talked to Ted, I believe, who was there. Within twenty minutes after we received the telegram, we had sent off a telegram saying we wanted to do it, to Kintner.

WHITE: Were you a part of the negotiating team? Leonard Reinsch was for the Democrats; Jim Shepley [James R. Shepley] was, I know, for Nixon.

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SALINGER: I was on a lower negotiating team with Herb Klein [Herbert G. Klein].

WHITE: That's a very low level, Pierre. [Laughter]

SALINGER: We negotiated what reporters were going to be on the show.

WHITE: Do you, after setting up the thing, remember anything of Kennedy's own reaction to it? Was he sure that he could take Nixon?

SALINGER: He was always very confident, but he was going to do his homework.

WHITE: He always did that?

SALINGER: Always did. He spent the day in Chicago with Sorensen, Feldman, and Goodwin. Then he came down to the studio. I remember when he arrived at the studio and when he had the first confrontation with Nixon. Nixon looked awful off camera. He really did. Kennedy went back to his dressing room and remarked how awful Nixon looked.

WHITE: Maliciously?

SALINGER: No, no. He just looked awful. Not that he [Kennedy] was not confident already, but it gave him an extra bit of confidence. He walked out of there knowing that he had him gone. I think he thought that Nixon was afraid.

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At the end of the debate, there was a lot of mixed reaction. A lot of people were saying it was a draw. Kennedy sent me out to talk to the press to find out what they thought happened. Scotty [James B. "Scotty" Reston] said it was a draw. The next day we hit Cleveland. The people were coming out of the walls.

WHITE: I remember.

SALINGER: As we drove down the street out of the car behind me we heard guys shout, "Keep going after him, keep after him. You really got a left leg, Jack." You knew it was the debate. You knew you were off the barrel.

WHITE: That was the quantum jump.

SALINGER: That was it. The ballgame was over. Of course, there was the second debate when the Nixon people tried to freeze the studio. They had them turn the temperature down to forty degrees or something. When you walked in there, you needed a parka, a fur coat in the goddamn joint.

WHITE: I think Nancy has got one thing that perhaps you should put in the record.

We spoke to Rose Kennedy sometime after that. She said, “I felt so sorry after the first debate. I felt I should say something to

[-91-]

Mrs...”

NANCY WHITE: No. No. “I felt so sorry for Nixon’s mother.”

WHITE: Yes. She felt sorry for Nixon’s mother because Nixon had lost the debate.

NANCY WHITE: The most motherly comment that I ever heard.

WHITE: Give me now....

SALINGER: Kennedy was always very disengaged about things up to a point.

WHITE: The only time I ever heard him use the word “prick” with vehemence was when he called Nixon “that prick.”

SALINGER: No. You’ve got to get the sequence of this, though, because this is something that happens to all candidates. You start out feeling that this guy you’re running against is an honorable fellow. We’re not going to say anything about each other to make each other mad. That’s the way it starts out. I remember about three weeks before the election. We’re in a motel in Ohio, Pennsylvania, or somewhere. Kennedy’s in the bathtub. I walked into the place and he said, “That Nixon’s a prick”—right out of the blue. You know what reminded me of it was about a few years later when I was in Fresno, California, I

[-92-]

was in a bathtub. Mike [unclear] came in. I said, “Alan Cranston [Alan M. Cranston] is a prick.” [Laughter] I guess at that moment I went back to the first day when John F. Kennedy said Nixon is a prick.

NANCY WHITE: Do you remember Jack at dinner about Nelson Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller]?

SALINGER: Yes. Yes.

WHITE: All right. Give me what he thought. Can you capsule what he thought about Nixon?

SALINGER: He said that he was dishonest.

NANCY WHITE: Was he really dishonest?

SALINGER: Well, he was. He ran dishonest campaigns. He was a dishonest fellow. But Kennedy thought that this was an advantage for him because he thought that nobody could really buy this guy. I think that he was probably surprised by the margin of the election. I think that he thought that he was going to win it by a larger margin.

WHITE: All right. Now bring me into the election night.

SALINGER: I would say, first of all...

WHITE: Describe this in detail. This was the last we have for this evening.

SALINGER: Let me back this up just a wee bit because I think this

[-93-]

is all a part of it. I would say that if the election was held a week before, Kennedy would have won it by a million and a half or two million votes. The tide was running. I remember that absolutely fantastic night we campaigned through Connecticut.

WHITE: Yes.

SALINGER: We ended up in Waterbury, Connecticut at 4 a.m. and found forty thousand people who had been waiting for five hours standing in front of this hotel. Kennedy was late.

WHITE: One of the great nights in this campaign.

SALINGER: Absolutely the greatest night of the campaign.

WHITE: With every fire engine out alongside the road?

SALINGER: So he got up on the balcony of this hotel and gave this fantastic speech. He went to bed at 4:30 or 5 a.m. feeling great and had to get up at 6:30 a.m. to start campaigning again. So we rolled on into the Boston election eve. There was a great rally at the Boston Gardens, and a tragic television show.

WHITE: Of which there is no TV tape that I can discover anywhere.

SALINGER: Which is probably the best thing that ever happened to anybody because this was a terrible disaster. So

[-94-]

everyone went to bed. I was so tired that night that I didn't even go to the goddamn rally in Boston Gardens. I watched it on television. About a half dozen White House reporters were clubbed by the Boston police. I was insulted by the press again for not being there to defend their lives. The next morning he voted and went up to the Cape.

WHITE: Tell it slowly and with joy. Go ahead.

SALINGER: I had set up this deal for the press at the Armory. I had run about three direct lines from the Armory into the Kennedy house, the Ambassador's [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] house. I guess I stationed Don Wilson [Donald M. Wilson] and Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] at the Armory, and I went over to spend the night at the Kennedys'. It started out like gangbusters; it started out like we were going to win by a landslide. In fact, the computer said we were. Then, everything started to go bad all over the place. By midnight it was a real dog race.

JFK would come over for a while, and then he would go back to his house. He would come over to watch for a while and then he would go back. Finally, about

[-95-]

2 a.m. he came over and stayed until about 4 a.m. Nixon came on the screen and said that he wouldn't concede. Kennedy said, "If I were he, I wouldn't concede either." Then he started to walk off, and I said, "What am I going to tell the press?" I hadn't even been down to see them yet. He said, "Tell them I went to bed. Wake me up if anything happens."

So I went down to the Armory and held a press conference that lasted a half hour to forty-five minutes. Finally, I got to bed about 6 a.m.

WHITE: I have a complete videotape of the press conference of yours. If you ever want it for your private collection, I can give it to you.

SALINGER: I'd love to have it sometime.

WHITE: I've got it.

SALINGER: I looked so tired that night.

WHITE: You looked beautiful; you looked so young. You were cupping your hand over ear like this to listen to questions. I suppose you were tired. But you were beautiful that night. Go ahead.

SALINGER: 6 a.m. I went to bed and 6:45 or 7 a.m. a guy called

[-96-]

me and said, "Kennedy just carried Minnesota. He's the president of the

United States.” Incidentally, we had gone to bed thinking he had carried California. So I said, “Well, God, I’d better get over there and tell him that he’s president.” I got in my car and left the Yachtsman. I started to drive. I had got about a block and a half from Kennedy’s house when I was stopped by a man whom I’d never seen before in my life. He was wearing a suit; he was very well dressed. He said, “Oh, Mr. Salinger, go ahead.” This was my first encounter with the Secret Service. The fascinating thing about it was that they had studied the Kennedy staff completely. They knew all of our names; they knew what we looked like; they knew who should have access to the President.

When I got there, I found that Sorensen had beaten me there by about two minutes and told Kennedy that he was president.

WHITE: Because he had carried California. Sorensen told the President.

SALINGER: I told him he was president because he had carried Minnesota.

[-97-]

WHITE: What did he say?

SALINGER: And Kennedy was in the bathtub. Whatever he had said, he had said to Sorensen. You know that. We then discussed what we would do during the day. I wanted to know when he would come down and have a press conference and make a statement. He said he wouldn’t do anything until Nixon spoke. I said, “Well, they may be a long time because Nixon claims he is not going to get up until 9 a.m. Pacific coast time, which would be noon. He said, “It’s up to him; he can get up anytime he wants.” He was very relaxed about it.

WHITE: Was he?

SALINGER: The he got up, put on some sports clothes, when out on the beach and took a walk. That was when that famous picture, the Mark Shaw picture of him just walking out on the beach, was taken.

WHITE: Yes. I want to keep you for ten more minutes. Can you keep going for ten more minutes? [Laughter] Nicole, I just want to ask one last major question in this area, but I do, unfortunately, have to change this tape.

[-98-]

[BEGIN TAPE 3]

WHITE: I asked Nixon how he felt that morning, and why in hell didn’t he challenge the election. 112,000 votes. If they reversed Missouri, Texas, Illinois, and one other state, he could be president. Eisenhower was in control of the troops, of the government. One hundred and twelve thousand votes is nothing;

it doesn't exist. It's an electoral fiction. Nixon gave me a lot of reasons. He started off technically. He said, "Well, we checked very quickly that night. We learned that we couldn't challenge the vote in Missouri until April; we couldn't have a recount under Missouri law until April." There was another technical reason in Illinois which Nixon did not tell me, but which I know, which is that the Republicans stole as many votes as the Democrats. He said, "But the fundamental thing was that at that hour of the morning we could tell there would be a Democratic majority in the House and the Senate. I decided that, if I challenged the election

[-99-]

and won by a technicality and had to govern on a technical basis against a Democratic Senate and a House, it would be useless. Anyway, there'd be a four or five month interim before they decided who won the election." This is Nixon's statement, and it came three years after that night. He said, "Thruston Morton [Thruston B. Morton] and Walter Judd [Walter H. Judd] and a couple of other guys kept insisting all night, 'We must challenge it; we must not accept.'" So Nixon finally accepted this margin and sent Herb Klein down to yield.

Was there any conference at all at Kennedy headquarters between morning at 9 o'clock and I first met the gang again at the Armory at about half past twelve, or whenever you came down to the press conference?

SALINGER: No. Closer to 2—2, 2:30, 3 o'clock.

WHITE: Was it that late? Because I went back with Bobby, it seems to me as though when we got back, they went to lunch. Was there any technical conference that morning on that they should do? Was it assumed then that they had won and would govern? Or was there some

[-100-]

question about whether they should accept it?

SALINGER: There was no formal conference, but there was a discussion at the house.

WHITE: Oh, tell, Pierre, in every detail.

SALINGER: Well, I'll do the best I can to remember. There was a discussion at the house in which it was assumed that there would be challenges because of the narrowness of the election.

WHITE: Who was present at this conference?

SALINGER: The President, Kenny, Larry, I believe Ted was there. Mike Feldman.

WHITE: You?

SALINGER: I was there. We assumed that they would challenge, particularly in Illinois where they were making a lot of sounds. There was some thought that, if they challenged, there might even be a real question about who would become president and a whole mish-mash. So, it was decided that we should proceed full scale so there would be no doubt in anybody's mind that we were confident we had won the election, and we were going

[-101-]

to go ahead with it. And not only that, but it should be the kind of a thrust forward from the election that would ignore the fact that John F. Kennedy had been elected by 112,000 votes. In other words, we figured that one vote was a mandate; he was now president of the United States.

WHITE: Let me annoy you and insist that you go in deeper into this. Bobby was, of course, there.

SALINGER: Bobby was there.

WHITE: This conference goes on in Bobby's house.

SALINGER: This conference goes on in J.P. Kennedy's house.

WHITE: The old man's house.

SALINGER: Right.

WHITE: At what hour of the morning? When he comes back from the walk on the beach?

SALINGER: Yes. I would say 11, 11:30 in the morning.

WHITE: 11, 11:30. And that's before he comes to the Armory for the press conference. Is the old man there?

SALINGER: As I recall, the old man was there; Teddy was there. Now, this is not a formal conference; this is...

[-102-]

WHITE: No, but these are more important.

SALINGER: This is just a group of people standing around talking. But this is the thrust of the conversation. This is before Nixon has conceded. The whole subject

of the Nixon concession is inextricable wound up in this whole idea that there may be a challenge. Not that there was any concern by anybody expressed about the outcome of the challenge, but the feeling that a challenge could tie up the presidency of the United States for a period of time which would make whoever was the winner of such a challenge in an untenable position.

WHITE: Who raised that thought?

SALINGER: I can't remember. I would say it was either the President or Bobby.

WHITE: Do you remember anything the President said during this conference?

SALINGER: His point throughout was that we should go forward on the basis that he had been elected president of the United States.

WHITE: He said that himself? He was not modest at this point?

[-103-]

SALINGER: No, no. I mean, it was not a question of modesty; it was a question of...

WHITE: I mean, he wasn't chicken about it, then, was he?

SALINGER: No. It was not a question of immodesty or modesty; it was a question of facing up to the reality of the situation and attempting to prevent his presidency from being crippled before it even got started by uncertainty.

WHITE: Do you remember where he was in this room at all? Think for a moment because this is a guy who could have blown it all in those three or four hours of that morning. He has 112,000 vote, as it turned out, lead. One tenth of one percent is a scaring thing.

SALINGER: As I recall, we were standing up at the west end of the living room, which is the.... How well do you know that room?

WHITE: Don't know it at all. I haven't been in that house. I've been in Bobby's and in Jack's.

SALINGER: It's kind of a porch which has been filled in. No,

[-104-]

no, it's not. The west end of the living room is next to another small living room which, again, is next to the dining room. I don't remember any more about it. I do remember that discussion.

WHITE: You're standing; you're not seated?

SALINGER: Standing around, right.

WHITE: And he's not in any doubt.

SALINGER: And he's not in any doubt.

WHITE: At this point, what are you calling him? Are you calling him Jack or Mr. President?

SALINGER: I never called him Jack.

WHITE: You called him Senator.

SALINGER: I always called him Senator.

WHITE: Do you remember that at all? At what point you called him Mr. President?

SALINGER: I think by that day I was calling him Mr. President.

WHITE: You see, he could have booted this thing right there in those three or four hours. There were two guys going through a certain sort of agony: Nixon and Kennedy. Who's president? The rules of the game gave it to Kennedy,

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but, if he had chickened at all, it would have blurred the presidency of the USA.

SALINGER: Well, we had a very funny incident. We had received a congratulatory telegram from Eisenhower the night before, and Jim Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] had called me to tell me there was a big mistake and would I please not say anything about the telegram, withdraw it from circulation. They had sent it, and they had thought Nixon was going to concede, but Nixon hadn't conceded. So they sent off the telegram anyway. So I told him, "Forget about it." The next morning Hagerty called me about noon—12:30—and said, "I just want you to know we're sending you another telegram because Nixon's going to concede in about a half hour." That's how we first heard that Nixon was going to concede. We actually had the television on at that moment to watch Nixon because of this Hagerty call.

WHITE: The whole Armory thing is recorded on videotape; it's there. When you came back—because I went back with Bobby—and you had lunch; then you went out, and you

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played. You played football.

SALINGER: Yes. We had a little game of touch football.

WHITE: Anything about that you remember?

SALINGER: No, except it was pretty jolly, and everybody was in a very good mood.

WHITE: There was a question that night about whether you would be press secretary or not. Do you remember that?

SALINGER: I remember I spent the night at the hotel. I think I went to bed that night I was so dammed tired. There might have been a question around the hotel. We had the meeting the next morning when Kennedy told me I was going to be press secretary.

WHITE: He told you? No question?

SALINGER: No question.

WHITE: I think at this point we ought to give both of these ladies the opportunity to ask one question. Nicole?

Mrs. SALINGER: No, I wish only that you would go on.

WHITE: No? Nancy? I've got some more tape here. I'm looking at Nicole, and she'd dead tired.

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SALINGER: Why don't we turn it off, though, because I want to get up early in the morning just to work on my book.

WHITE: Okay. Good enough.

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[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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