

John B. White Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 9/19/1983
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Biographical Note

White, John B.; Writer, mythologist, newspaperman, amateur astronomer; Reporter, Washington Times Herald, Boston Herald-Traveler; combat correspondent, Marine Corps; Friend of Kathleen Kennedy. White discusses his relationship with Kathleen Kennedy, her personality, and her relationship with her family. He also discusses his interactions with, and thoughts about, John F. Kennedy, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

John Baker White

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John B. White

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Oral History Interview

with

John B. White

September 19, 1983
Cambridge, Massachusetts

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Ok, why don't we begin, I gather from.... I ought to tell you, by the way, that I have read the galleys so that I'm familiar with a lot of the citations from your dairy...

WHITE: Yeah.

STERN: ...so that your relationship with Kathleen Kennedy began it seems from her account with a lot of arguments over religious issues and various other things. What were your very first impressions of her.

WHITE: That would be mostly when I did Lynne McTaggart. It'd be in the diaries. Would you want me to.... Refresh my memory with those things.

STERN: If you'd like, sure.

WHITE: Apparently...

STERN: You have a notation from the very first time you met her?

WHITE: I think so. I kept these damn things in strange random fashion. I'm looking for

the... '41. I'm looking for the times that I was in Washington. "Keeping an eye on Frank Waldrup's girls." He always had.... They usually come to him first. The standard route to come to Washington in those days was to go to Arthur

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Kreps, everybody seemed to know him. He was a magical figure who had much influence on everybody, and he quite often sent people on to Frank Waldrup of the *Times Herald* [*Washington Times Herald*.] Audrey came to Frank Waldrup from Ms. Patterson so he was a sort of clearinghouse for newcomers and he would sometimes give them jobs directly with him until he could find something else. And he.... Extremely fine girls would go through his office and I was also, would be keeping an eye on them. Here we come to Thursday, October 16, 1941, miscellaneous, "talked with Waldrup. I'd like very much to talk to him about Kreps and _____" and so forth and then "bicker with Kathleen Kennedy, the Irish Catholic speaking fool." I wrote it, but it....

STERN: Why this....was this your first assessment of her?

WHITE: Well, we disagreed so violently about birth control. I go ahead and say "she is best fun to argue with of any girl I've known since Fran Williams because she's always wrong." I guess that's the first notice I've got of her. "She even called me up after I got home to tell me birth control is murder. I told her it's the Catholic Church's way of keeping membership." Then...how much do you want of this?

STERN: As much as you care to put on the record.

WHITE: All right. Do you want any outside stuff or do you just want her?

STERN: Well, stuff relating to her and her family.

WHITE: "Was dug in the"...I guess I'm sitting someplace. "I was dug in the back and it was a Kennedy girl, good little creature." That's on Monday the 20th. On Tuesday, October 21, something happened, I suppose. "Kennedy girl"...I put

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Kennedy and then the symbol for female, apparently I don't have females. "Kennedy girl here at night...alone, supper with me, the lights in most of the house out. And then Mr. Arthur Polk here to spend the night, seen *Mata Hari*, Garbo and _____ and *I Met a Murdered*." I was living then with my sister and her husband, Henry Field, in Georgetown, on 3018 Dumbarton Avenue, a great big house with Henry Field. He liked grandeur. He couldn't really afford it, but he liked it. So there are a lot of rooms, could be people in there you hardly even knew. It was a very interesting, nice, what a grand house. Thursday, the 23rd of October, "During these days managed to see Fred Astair and Rita Hayworth in *You'll Never Get Rich*, again with the Kennedy girl. She did not believe in birth control." I don't

know why we argued so about birth control. Friday the 24th, “Somebody made.... Up late at night talking with the Kennedy girl about a medical dictionary.” I must have.... I thought very strongly then and now about birth control, and I had the feeling that she was deciding what she had been taught. She had to come back to the subject herself occasionally as if she wished to be argued out of it. That was a lot of her attitude. Often she would make these preposterous statements just to draw up some response to get into an argument as though she was trying to think to herself that she wanted the exercise of defending something that she’d never even dreamt was attackable before. Then, in this time I was writing articles on mental illness, writing a series of articles on that for the paper. It was a typical harebrained project of our city editor who was about as old as I was and had these wild ideas that we could settle the whole subject of mental

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illness just by sending a reporter out. I went out on it for something like six weeks, we’d go to the mental hospital in Washington, St. Elizabeth’s, where Ezra Pound was then. It was a very excellent hospital. Dr. Olson was the head of it, we became fast friends and I used to go out and plead to be allowed to stay there, but it was not allowed. And she was very interested, she was extremely interested in those stories, more so than really they were worth, so much that after a while I began to ask her why she was so interested. However, that comes a little later. This was in the early times. Sunday the 26th, “Up and K. Kennedy over.” She used to like to come to our house cause it was such a, it was a lot of fun, so many people. She was living then in a tiny little room someplace across the river. I’ve got her address somewhere here. “K. Kennedy over. We eat at Hotshots then with Tracy,” Tracy Barnes, “and after we read unintelligible rules, play croquet. Croquet. K. and I win the first game and probably would have won the second, only I was facing the decision of becoming a rover like Tracy and going out and when roped, when asked advice only Tracy, nobody gave me advice other than how to play croquet very well.” Apparently you’re supposed to keep yourself free to harass the enemy rather than go out. You know the game of croquet?

STERN: Not really, no.

WHITE: Anyway, that’s the thing. You don’t go out ‘cause then you’re finished. You just harass the enemies and.... “So they said, ‘Go out,’ and I did, leaving K. as she said bitterly, ‘Like the English did to fight the mad Greek.’” That was the first time I ever saw her competitive. We were partners

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when I went out and left her with two against her. It surprised me that she cared about a little game like that much. She was the least competitive.... We were talking about that too, the business of playing games, the world play.... I said I have a motto. I play to win and I fight to kill. It was such an absurd thing it made me laugh. She took it quite seriously. She said, “A pretty good way to go through life,” and I said, “Wash it, scrub it, it’s not serious.” “Then we

fooled around, fooled around. Anne Fuller, like me, Anne Fuller, like me, shocked at the state of K.K.'s mind, but regarded her as clay to be molded."

STERN: What do you mean, shocked at the state of her mind?

WHITE: Well, that, that rigid Catholic upbringing, that comparativeness and the adherence to form, everything must be done, you must dress properly, everything and she was very ready to argue about it, that is, she was, it seemed that for the first time she was questioning those things and there were so many of them that you can appear to be careless but you really must be what the English call _____ let it be in earnestness. If somebody says, "You've got to play tennis." "Oh, I haven't played in years. I've tried," when you've actually secretly been practicing. You beat everybody and laugh and say, "I'm sorry, it's just a game. I've been very lucky." That was allowed. You could appear to be careless, but you really should be dead serious, and you should look it and act it. Life is a fight. People like me never operated that way, and we were surprised. We might have been as far off to the sloppy side as she was on the good side, maybe somewhere in the middle would have been sensible.

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What we did was we had good arguments like that, we'd come together closer. I'd yield a point here and there. She yielded more because she was wrong more than I was, I have to think. "K. and I take Mrs. Brown to the Mayflower and then inspect Cathedral, my old school, only not drive through. Discuss whether I'm unconventional or not. I say I think not, only in small ways perhaps. Trot home." She just lived across the river. I'd trot back. That's what we do a lot of the time, argue about customs and people. She was insatiable about what people can do, what they should allow themselves to do and what, I think, charmed here about our house was that there was quite a lot of really obviously excellent people there, Lord Halifax, the British ambassador, who'd come occasionally. My brother-in-law, Henry Field, was an anthropologist and a very gregarious fellow. He loved to gather in everybody and my sister was a good hostess. So on Sundays afternoons we'd have a big spread of spaghetti and red wine. It was almost like a salon. It wasn't all that much wit flying around, but people would come confident of seeing other friends and interesting people and that, I'm sure, charmed Kathleen, the idea that she could be falling apart like that and still acceptable and in fact have a good time at it. She, of course, was just excellent. She was variously, whoever she was talking to, truly interested and she'd go right at 'em trying to _____ how they liked it and give them a wonderful time and then in general she was just such a bright, gay spirit. They were happy times.

October 27, "Make some arrangements about going to New York. Missed..." I don't know whether we went to New York together or what but here I miss her on the train back. "She telegraphed me, "see you on the next one" so have to wait in

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Union Station. Nothing but hot dogs and baked apples and carbonated soda.” I guess she came...

STERN: You don't have any recollections of the trip?

WHITE: I do. One trip, it was very typical. I can't remember whether we went up together or met in New York, but she used to stay at a hotel called the Blackstone, I think, probably one of those.... I never learned about her family power until quite late in Houston, particularly how, and then when I found these layers of great power coming in she would say, "Well, I'll be going to my hotel now." I'd got to the hotel with her, and she would say in sort of an embarrassed fashion to the doorman or the man at the desk and he would jump up and get all flustered and say, "Do you want your usual room" and whatnot. I would go to her room, and pretty well tuck her in or something. We never had the deepest sex relations. We played about it pleasantly a lot but not what people.... It was a very innocent affair. But I'd sit there, and she would say, "You've got to leave the door open if you're going to sit here." It was a tiny, little room, and I'd say, "Why do I leave the door open," and she'd say, "Because Daddy's going to have to, walking around, see what's happening." If she had the door shut, I'm in trouble, and I said, "What do you mean Daddy's going to have..." "Well," she said, "he owns this hotel." Little things like that would pop up. I don't know what _____ but the first thing that truly astonished me was the dossier. When I met her I took her out a few times and then she began dribbling little bits of information to me. "How did you like Carver, North Carolina?" "That's where I came from. I liked it a lot, that's where I came from." She'd say, "at the

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Episcopal high school, did you learn much to get you ready for Harvard College?" "Yes, I learned a lot." You know, things like that slide off of you, but after about three of them you begin to wonder, where the hell is this girl learning all that. Not many people even know, it's not what you carry around. So I said, "Where are you getting all this stuff?" She said, "Well, after we meet somebody new, all of us children, when we meet somebody new, have to call our daddy and he takes the name and he puts his people onto it," check, I don't think that was the phrase, anyway he finds out about each person and the next night, next time we call he'll say, either it's ok to go out with them, or it's not. She said, "Of course we don't totally obey, but it's better if you do," and I said, "Well, what did he think of me?" She said, "Oh, nutty, but harmless." All right. No comment. Then at the hotel, that sort of thing, she would check in with him. It was habitual. I don't know whether she did as much as the others, but she literally.... Every night every one of them called, but it was pretty often. And it wasn't just like little lambs reporting to the shepherd, I guess they talked about things.

STERN: Did you ever call her _____?

WHITE: No. November 2, "Going to Harvard Club, make phone cal to K. Kennedy to arrange for trip back." Oh yes, there were other things in those parties, in

those New York trips. Left to myself we'd go to the movies or walk on the river just to be about. She was wonderful fun to be with and only a few times she in a very hesitant and embarrassed fashion said would I like to go to '21.' Remember '21', they may have been other grand places like

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that. These night clubs. I'd been there once in a great long while. Some rich person chose to take me. It was way the hell out of my range. But it was amusing, and again she would sort of duck her head and people would jump up and the waiters, and it was a strange feeling, 'cause see, I never quite got through my head that she was of this enormously powerful brood. 'Cause she was clearly embarrassed by it. She didn't seem to like it, but I don't know why should would do it. Maybe, maybe to meet, yeah, to meet some friend. That was the whole business. So the New York trips would be movies and.... she loved to meet people so I'd go, I'd take her to see my friends a lot. She liked, she liked anybody.

STERN: How did she relate to people?

WHITE: Very well, instantly. She was good, she was cheerful, really high hearted and could get right at 'em, what do you do, how do you like it, where do you come from. Truly interested, all the time, and who can resist that? And then she'd get into arguments and always good natured, handled them so they didn't get out of hand. She was a master with people. It was a pleasure to introduce her to anybody, any age. Lord up, when you're in the newspaper you learn to make friends all the way from the top to the bottom, and she was good with every one of them. I sort of concentrated on the bottom when, she was less, she was less familiar with them, it was a more rich experience.

STERN: What was her.... Did you ever talk to her about her family, and particularly about her parents and her relationship with them? And her sisters, for that matter?

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WHITE: Oddly, I picked up impressions but didn't see fit to ask her much. As I began to learn, her father, I knew very well her father had gotten thrown out of England, and that hadn't been so far before and had been, he was a controversial fellow. And then of course the stories about his behavior, while they're in Washington.... She had volunteered, but I rather liked the fact she didn't, I thought that good and loyal. I could tell from her what she undoubtedly felt about it, but she never, no she didn't speak about it. And as her siblings, Jack comes in later on and he.... It's really hard to reconstruct. She certainly got along well with him and Eunice and the others would pop up now and then.

STERN: Eunice kind of....

WHITE: No, not much. You'd never see her. These days, first it was Kathleen and then Jack, and they lived together for awhile and then the war came. And Eunice... I picked up with it much later on after the war. When Kathleen died, I was somewhat of a friend of Jack's and Eunice's and used to see them a bit. But I drifted away from them after. Eunice never surfaced in this time.

This was just before the war. "She's coming on the 7:30 train, wait in station for an hour. She arrived at 11:35 and abused me, said she came to Penn Station information booth at 6:25, ran to gate and waited there until it closed. Mutual abuse." [Laughter] She was always the best one to fight with. You could pretend to lose your temper and so would she, but you'd both enjoy it mightily. She could laugh and squabble and she was very good at it. She would make bogus points and she would always go *ad hominem*. If you really get the better of her she'd say, "Well, what do you

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know about it? Have you ever been there?" or "Have you ever read that in a book? What's your authority for that?" And if you didn't watch out, you'd get tripped up. That had really nothing to do with the argument, is this statement true, is that statement true, but she, as long as she could win it she was fine, she was very believable. She go *ad hominem* and she'd reason which is a really popular woman's trick.

STERN: You went to a lot of movie with her. What kind of movies did she like?

WHITE: She didn't really like it as much as I did, I found. I used to drag her to them. But afterwards she'd break in to talk about who did what and why, she wanted to talk about why the people did that in the movie. She was just insatiate about people and she'd rather be talking than going to the movies. And she could make anybody entertaining. There was never a time when you weren't interested and wrapped up and quite often argumentative with her. She had a huge knack for picking the wrong side of everything and then defending it pretty skillfully, and that's attractive, you know, she's wrong and you're right, and yet you can't run right over her.

STERN: Is that _____ a small passage in the Taggart book she mentions rather a discussion which you had about Rosemary.

WHITE: Yeah, yeah. I didn't put that down in the diary. I thought maybe it was somewhat confidential. Later on, somewhere along in this period, when I was doing those stories, mental illness stories, I came to the one about electroshock which was brand new then. I've got those stories, if you'd

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like to Xerox them, but I don't think they'll do you much good. Anyway, talking about that and I went up to St. Elizabeth's and saw it. They probably set me up a good one 'cause the woman was catatonic and she came out talking more. I was all excited about it and Kathleen,

she said, "Let's go for a nice long walk." And it was a sunny day, and we went for a walk in Rosemont Park near the old place on "R" Street, Dumbarton Oaks. It was a pretty quiet park and we were walking through. We were in this part of it, near the tall grasses, I remember she was trailing her hand along one of these grasses and looking down. She was very solemn and quiet for her, and I was babbling on about, God almighty, can you imagine this woman in effect dead, lost and they fit her with electricity and life comes back.... And she said, "Well," and then she said, "I've got a sister who is," and I can't remember exactly what she said, but....

STERN: What was her attitude? Was she ashamed about it?

WHITE: Yeah, she was extremely embarrassed and very interested in what I was saying as maybe a hope. Also, they were talking about the ice-pick operation then, the pre-frontal lobotomy.

STERN: Right.

WHITE: Dr. Freeman's electro-shock and the ice-pick were both brand new and holding out a lot of hope, and she said, "I have a sister." And I again felt that.... We did talk somewhat more about it. I tried to bring it back to saying what I'd learned and emphasized the hopefulness of treatment and also lack of shame. I was trying to make a point that it was a good thing

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that people can be treated and their families shouldn't be....

STERN: Right. How did she respond to that?

WHITE: Very interested, fascinated, as though it were relieving her of the shame that they had done it. In those days the word "commit" was so ugly. A good family doesn't commit. You put them up in the attic or hide 'em, you don't commit 'em. It was a pejorative, ugly word. And this, I think, that she was taking great comfort in the thought, that maybe that's where there was hope, treatment.

STERN: When did Jack come into the picture?

WHITE: Well, let's skip ahead. It goes on like that. "She calls me a shrinking, bald-headed, irritable old man. I call her ignorant, thick-headed Mick. I don't know why I enjoy her company so much. Our paper today, *The Times Herald*, was so wicked and we were isolationists. Our paper today had a perfectly fearful cartoon soldier rising out of his grave saying 'May God damn you if you lied to your children as you lied to us.'" She and I were both working for that paper. I hated that.... "You take the king's shilling and you are the king's men." You never had, non of us ever had to write anything we didn't believe in. If you didn't like that, you didn't have to write it. I used to do editorials. I never

did or knew of anybody in our paper who had to do a thing you didn't believe in. There are plenty of people who believe in that. "England has won the war and you take tow, three years to prove it. [long pause, turning pages] Wednesday the nineteenth of November."

Oh, here, "Monday the twenty-fourth of November, supper Inga R. Vabs, K. and J. Kennedy and I." I don't get that. He'd have been around

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a bit, I just don't remember exactly when it was. I didn't like him as much as I did her.

STERN: What were your impressions of Jack?

WHITE: It wasn't that I didn't like him. I just didn't... I don't think we liked each other much. He was sort of like me. He was a woman chaser, and I think we sized each other up. When he was busy, he was on the way. He'd written his book, and I was clearly a frivolous scholar, and a frivolous scholar doesn't much care about a serious one and vice versa. I had a little, a little awe of him as having completed a book. I meant to read it, but I never got around to it. But what did really get me about him was later on when we got friendly, he said that the most beautiful book he's ever read was *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T.E. Lawrence. And that won me over. I hadn't even read that. I dabbled at it, but the way he said it, it suddenly came out of nowhere and it was, it seemed to lift him out of being just a hard-driving _____ to a thoughtful, somewhat compassionate man. It made a big difference in my.... Now that's when I began going over to see him more, after she was dead. I thought better of him, but neither.... It wasn't dislike, it was just different courses.

STERN: What was your impression of his relationship with Kathleen? I think at one point _____ saying that she was his sort of courage or....

WHITE: You mean the earliest days. I hardly saw him, I'd see her. He was busy. Then later on I thought more about, I thought about her side of everything, and I thought that she was a great source of interest to him and I really can't

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remember whether she told me or somebody else but I gathered that she, her course of breaking away from the traditions, he was very interested and was beginning to follow. And I heard, a long time later, that he had begun to break away when that business of Colin Mungaro, getting the oil, and the feeling that God was giving him a little touch, shooed him back into the church. I don't, really don't remember whether he said that or who said it but he was a floating _____ I don't think it's in the diary. And I do remember vividly sometime after, after the war and whether or not it was after Kathleen died, I was at a big party, a Kennedy party, and... I think it was when she was still alive in England with her Irishman, I think it was at that stage and....

STERN: Her husband died.

WHITE: ...yeah, and Eunice, we had a sort of armed truce, we got along all right, but she drove me off against the wall at this party and really savaged me. She said, "You influenced her," and I said, "What?" "Yeah, you propped her out of the church." She was really angry, angry about it, and I don't know what I said, but the attack came out of nowhere, and I hadn't thought that I had that much influence, I don't think I had, but I think she was going out and she may have gotten a little problem from people like me. But this, as if I'd single handedly, and a real anger, and I had the feeling that underneath she too was tempted, and the idea that it had been done and she hadn't done it, some subtle feeling that if it hadn't been done I wouldn't have to worry, but since it had been done, I have to think maybe... It stuck with me, it still does, that strange feeling that the attack was way out of proportion. The fact

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was she had done it, and a million things could have caused it. To pick one person who could be a sort of symbol, I thought that she was making me a symbol of something that she was struggling with herself. And somewhat the same with Jack. He would talk, and he seemed, I really can't remember clearly about him, but after he was.... We were all together there this time. We had a lot of fun because Inga, I was devoted to Inga, and so was he, and Kathleen and I and Jack and Inga would all go out, and at that time his father didn't exactly approve of Inga but he approved of her as a teacher of certain things of which she was very good at. And Jack was a very apt pupil. But it didn't seem right to have her going with him because she was even then the famous ex-mistress of Alex Wenner-Gren. And Pappa Joe approved, but they must be discreet. So we'd go out, the four of us. I had a little car, and we'd go someplace, and then, almost as if in the movies, _____ Jack and Inga would get out, someplace, and Kathleen and I would cruise around, go to a movie or whatnot, come back at the appointed moment and pick them up. Jack, the minute he got out of the car, he'd yank his shirttail out. He was always hot in Washington. He had nothing but pants and shirt. He'd pull his shirttail. I didn't know what he was going to do. And that was, I guess, that was the first thing that attracted me about him. He was such a, he was a likeable fellow. If he turned his attention to you, of course, you were done for. You couldn't resist him. Those evenings I do remember with a great deal of pleasure, feeling of furtiveness and almost spywork.

STERN: I'm curious about something. Did you see kind of a double standard with Kathleen _____ being very cautious

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about sexual activities for herself. She obviously knew that Jack and Inga, I don't see how she couldn't have, known that they must have been sleeping together.

WHITE: Total double standard, total.

STERN: For him it was all right.

WHITE: Absolutely. Well, I guess she had the example of her mother. That's the way of life. You don't even question it. We did argue about that. That was, that became more emergent, of course. I was not all that.... Well, I was not the most, I was not in the league with Jack. I was busy and when I'd, at first we'd tell her that I'd been out with another girl and had even kissed her, she'd get very angry and I figured that the double standard meant that at least while you're supposedly together you don't branch off, that Jack was all right because he was a free man. He and Inga could do what they want. But that certainly her father wasn't all right. That was, she seemed to be right on her mother's side, that when you're allied to somebody you don't do that. I respected that. But what I argued with is why shouldn't she and I, between _____ which we were in effect the best of friends. But she, I don't know how, the way we put it into words, but the idea was that she just wasn't, didn't want to do that and I respected that. But she was perfectly content to talk about it. We would scramble around a lot and very good-natured, and when it came, my pressure would scramble around some more, then she wouldn't, she didn't seem in the least neurotic. She just had such strong principles that in that matter I wouldn't dream, well, I did a little bit, but I wouldn't dream of really pressing on it because by that time I began to feel that

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ultimately we should have to part with the trap of marriage and knew damn well that if we could go all the way to bed that that for her would mean a commitment to marriage _____ For her Jack is the best example of double standard you could ever imagine. No flurry of disapproval.

STERN: That was _____ You didn't see it?

WHITE: No. At least she didn't show it. Very interesting. Yeah. I don't remember we had explicit discussions. I think it's almost impossible that she didn't know, 'cause Inga was, she and Inga were dear friends. All of us were, except me and Jack, everybody was friends outside, so Inga would talk to me about Jack. And she said.... I have several girls who talk to me about him, and they all said the same thing, that he was irresistible when he came on, but then they figured that he really had a book, some official little book that he'd check them off. And they said that can hurt but it can also pique you. One of them was at a party after he was president, and she knew Jackie and she knew Jack both. She came as a friend of Jackie, and at, in the White House, at the dinner, he wasted no time at all. He just said, "I would like to see you again." He said, "Let us all meet. I want to see *you* again." She said, "You know I'm Jackie's friend." She got home and the telephone rang. It was him, and she said, "Who can not be all excited, the president of the United States?" And he said, "I'm sending a car around for you, and she said, "You are not." But she said she had the devil of a time, and he was totally honest, she said totally honest, and she finally got loose, but she sort of appended it afterwards she'd never met anything with that force, direction of force, and she could pretty well figure what would

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happen if the affair would terminate pretty quickly but also quite honestly, as she did tell me, she said in a girl's life that hardly ever happens. That was the charm of it, that he was a charming guy with this immense, as she said he said to her, "I'm a maximist." A maximist. I want to maximize everything. So, on with the....

STERN: Certainly when that _____ commercial came out...

WHITE: I don't think it's possible....

STERN: _____

WHITE: I think that, well, I'm pretty sure that she hadn't gone any farther with anybody than she did with me. She may. I'm pretty sure that if we had, there would have been a genuine commitment. There would have had to be a genuine commitment on both sides, and it may be that she had experimented. No, I don't think so. Remembering back, I think that she was holding herself for her husband. So, it's "November 24, K.K., _____ she'd say she'd get and hold friends by letting them talk about themselves, which they enjoy. She liked to have them happy. I'd say that's a course out of friendship." Oh, my gosh. I can't understand this. "I'd say that's a course out of friendship and declare them quitting her gag and yakking one-half friends at once. Bestow that such friendship was no good." That's what embarrasses me. I wrote it, but I can't.... How could anybody feel like that? Her statements.... "Quote the Bible to her, 'Better to give than to receive.' She'd say that applied only to material things. Quite an arguer." [Sigh] "Sleep at ten, waked by phone. K.K. giving me a call." I always think she was a very, very funny.... She said, "I'm giving you a call," giving you a

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telephone call. "First, something.... Missed K.K.... Jack Kennedy, we had an early supper with Inga and her mother," nice old tyrant, I'm sure I've got a nice picture of Inga. I didn't have when I saw....

STERN: _____

WHITE: No, let's see. Here. "1405 Twenty-first Street, Northwest. Afterwards, double parked in street near K's, 1405 Twenty-one. Rubbing her back, she has slight gut pain. Cops drove up and said, 'Twenty dollars is a lot for double parking, isn't it?' We agreed and drove off. I should have handed him a twenty dollar bill and said, 'No, not really.' Trying very....I wanted to go to Africa."

STERN: What does that mean?

WHITE: “Also, a bit troubled,” – this is Wednesday, third of December. “Bit troubled over whether K.K. is in love with me. But too busy to ponder on that.” Mind you, Washington in those days was so full of women, and my life was so full of women that she’d burst forth to become.... By the way, the most important, there’s still a lot, but you can’t just drop your friends, and it was a hell of a busy time. The paper was busy. Everything was busy so that the government was not as callous and strange as it sounded. What I wish she’d said is, “Are we in love with each other?”

STERN: I was intrigued by those passages in the _____ coverage in the diary about those sessions in which....

WHITE: That was one of the nicest parts, I must say, that we had a stable relation once we’d agreed passively that there was not going to be full sex. We had.... I loved

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to abuse backs but she had a good strong back and she liked to be rubbed and so we would.... She’d put on her pajamas, and I’d sit on the edge of her bed, and we had some of the nicest of all the talks then, till she’d pretty well drift off to sleep. Very nice because there was no.... If you’re not looking at somebody, it’s easier to talk. That was very, utterly delightful. I felt as close to her as could be.

STERN: I can’t.... This may be a completely incorrect observation, but I just had the feeling reading those that there was something sort of, on the one hand, very seductive about your doing that, and on the other hand, kind of infantile. I’m curious about the combination.

WHITE: She was very womanly attractive, but in an extremely healthy way. Seductive was hardly a word to put to her. That relation, the rubbing of the back... No I didn’t think it was infantile, we were complete equals. She would rub my back occasionally. It was just a delight in the feeling of having, mainly her shoulders. No, I didn’t think, feel any return to her mother or anything like that. I didn’t feel that. She might have, but I don’t think so.

STERN: I was curious particularly about this visit you made in 1942 on Labor Day to the Hyannis compound.

WHITE: Oh, well, we can get, we can go on that that if you want.

STERN: Well, if you have other material, that’s fine, but I do...

WHITE: I can skip through because I’ve got these things outlined in red.

STERN: ...okay, good.

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WHITE: This is Saturday, sixth of, Jesus Christ, sixth of December, 1941.

STERN: _____

WHITE: Oh no, here comes Sunday, this is the one that really embarrasses me, "Sunday, December 7, 1941. Japan declared war on the U.S. We, my sister and Kathleen and I were having lunch at the Hot Shot in Washington, across the Potomac there. "It was odd," I've got here, "odd. Before lunch, K.K. asked me, if it was necessary, which branch of the service I would go into. Argue about the necessity until she's saying, 'Well, people began sending you white feathers.'" There was a movie called, *Four Feathers*, then, very good movie about British people and the white feather sign of cowardice, and this man, really a great hero, of course, pretending not to be, and something happened and four of his friends put white feathers on his plate and then there came the great war. He went out and daring, he saved each one of their lives, secretly left a feather. Wonderful. And she said, "'What'll you do?' I said, 'If there's a war, I have no intention of going into it.' I would take the wrong side quite often just to get her stirred up, and she wouldn't do it. And again I'd think it's so absurd to think anybody wouldn't go into the war, but she'd, she trying to take it seriously, said, 'What if people start sending you white feathers?' and I said I would just paper my house with them, feather my nest with them. I'm discouraged. This is the same day K.K. said she would rather be shrewd than wise." That is, that's what disappoints me at that moment, three pretty sensible people. My sister was very fascinated by politics, passionately

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into international events. We must have said some interesting things 'cause all over the radio came the news. Pearl Harbor. Kathleen and I went back to the paper we worked. I can't remember, and I haven't got any red things that were said.

In the *Times*, of course, was up for treason. They released the plans on Pearl Harbor just before it happened. And if it hadn't been the real Pearl Harbor they would blame the *New York Daily News* and the *Chicago Tribune*. The Justice Department was getting ready to bring them to court, and they would have won. 'Cause they were wicked, wicked papers. "January 7, call K.," these were just little things, calling back and forth. Now here, "January 11, Inga called saying she, Jack and K.K. having supper at her house. Would I join them. No, Inga...." Here, "January 15, no sooner in office and become involved in the great case of the Ambassador's son and the beautiful blond spy. In his column yesterday in the *New York News*, Winchell said, 'What Washington gal columnist has set her cap for one of Joe Kennedy's sons so much she is divorcing her explorer husband. Papa Joe no like.' Inga first tell me about it in excitement, must say she was looking her very best. She said, 'Waldrup and Mrs. Patterson curious, about to write editorials' and so forth and said, "Waldrup had found that the FBI told Winchell that he, Waldrup, wrote violent castigation of the FBI which was secretly a great friend of his. Then K. talked of it with me in between harassing me about

last night. J. Kennedy in office evidently discussing Waldrup moving ponderously about all manner. To be here for supper and early exhaustive analysis _____” That’s about all in that bit. Here’s January 14. “K. report that

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her father passed through town, think the great Inga scandal very funny and tell Jack to do just as he wished.”

STERN: That’s fascinating.

WHITE: Yeah.

STERN: _____

WHITE: It could be both. I remember. We’d argue.... This is typical. “Meet K. walking over, meet K. walking over. Meet at Arlington Cemetery and inspect the house, the Lee house where she uprooted a bunch of the wickets surrounding LaFont’s tomb before God ordered her to put them back.” She was quite mischievous. “Once here I got a great desire to smear her lipstick, so finally do so, with thumb and forefinger she dabbed jelly in my hair. We have the car for the afternoons.” Then, between she and me it begins to.... “I just love these little adventures, discuss in usual detailed fashion. She wanted to discuss every little thing, what does it mean for the _____” She was a good reporter. “K., Inga and Waldrup went driving _____ K, Inga and Waldrup went driving Jack’s car to Charleston. Then Frank _____ Inga and K. in Inga’s apartment. K. called, laughed over Waldrup’s telling of sordidness in Tennessee mountains. She says she fears if she married me I would relax what little pride I have and spend time lying on a messy bed with a bottle beside me and hold our children running about in dirty clothes and so forth. I said the mess around me would never cease or at the least it’s internal mind _____ Suffered Inga’s rage Wake Ireland. 1405 21 pick up K. Help K. move to Jack’s apartment.” This is 24 January ’42. “Help her move to Jack’s apartment 2480 16 Adams 16th Street, Adams 6375 was the telephone

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number. She’d take me here and often _____” There for a while he had his place and she had hears. “She.... supper later. I can’t believe it’s four dollars and seventy-three cents, Washington to New York on the train. The bus is three dollars and forty cents.” I was always poor in those days and she liked that, too, I think. It amused her. I think she really liked to be really straightforward push. I don’t know. “K. and I argue about whether I like exercise. She said if I did I would take it. I say no, a man of literature might like the movies but never go.” K. didn’t _____ There are a lot of little diddle daddles in here _____ “Mrs. Roosevelt.”

STERN: You can jump to that Labor Day trip to Hyannis Port if you like. I’m very curious about that.

WHITE: All right.

STERN: Your impression of the family, the house, relationship.

WHITE: No.

STERN: Is that the first time you'd ever gone there?

WHITE: I only ever went, once. I went back after, after it all, after she was dead. Let's see. That would have been September, Labor Day...

STERN: Labor Day '42, right?

WHITE: ... '42. That Thursday, September the first. Wednesday, September 7th.... Oh hell...

STERN: Missed the bus as I recall.

WHITE: Yeah, I missed the bus and got there quite late, and Papa Joe, I never met him before. He said, "You're late," that's all. "You're late." There was nothing to be said except "Yes." And then...

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STERN: No explanation asked for?

WHITE: None. No, that was pretty much the extent of the conversation. "You're late." "Yes." _____ say "I'm sorry," there's no room for anything, just a factual exchange. Then, I don't know whether he took me into the house or Kathleen, or it must have been.... Yes, I came in the bus.... There was a funny little thing. I don't even know if I put it in my book or not, but when I was in college there was a famous black taxi driver, Georgie Taylor, who stuttered, one of the nicest guys in the world. He could spell any word, metaphysical or whatever, but he couldn't _____ and he finally wound up driving for the Kennedys, and coming into the bus station would call up and who arrives but him driving this great stone boat, and I'd throw my arms around him, "M-i-s-t-e-r White, things are d-i-f-f-e-r-e-n-t now." So he drove me to the compound and there I guess I saw Papa Joe first. He probably just turned me loose so I wandered into the house and there's "I am," second of these factual statements, "I am Mrs. Kennedy."

STERN: Why do you think that was?

WHITE: I'm trying not to say, "I don't doubt you." I didn't say anything, 'cause _____ and I saw right behind her a huge red piece of glass. "And I'm John White."

inadequate after her statement. I said, That's a beautiful piece of glass, and she lit up a lot. "You're late," and "I am Mrs. Kennedy." I should think you could say heavy disapproval was in the air. "Then we went and played tennis, and Kathleen and I were playing against Jack and

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Eunice, I think, something." I was, they were pretty good. I wasn't quite that good. We were all somewhat in the same league. But they were so serious. I'd just finished reading the book *Gamesmanship: The Art of Winning Games Without Actually Cheating*. Did you ever read that?

STERN: No.

WHITE: Funny book, about an Englishman. How you disarm your opponent legally but if you can win legally, by all means wipe him out. But if you can't win legally, then by jokes or whatever, so I saw we were going to lose and I took up the story after every point. I would credit it to us if it went the other way. They at first thought I didn't know how to score tennis. They kindly corrected me, and I'd say, "No, five love." You mean, "love five." "Five love." And their politeness was such they couldn't insist, so the next point would again go to them, love thirty, and I'd say "thirty love." "You mean love thirty." "Thirty love." And they had no defense against that sort of obtuseness, so they quit scoring and they went by my score just so they'd get some exercise. By my score we won six love, six love, never lost a point. K. went from the tennis court, all four of us, and we're sitting on the porch. "Well, how'd you do?" "Fine, fine." "Who won?" And they're getting ready to say, and I'd say, "We won." Kat, all three of them, "Yes, we won six love, six love," and I could see this, the people on the porch. That's all right, you know, if these other two and Kathleen her self, "You can't play around with scores like that, we didn't really win." She looked at me, and I said, "Well, that's the score, isn't it?" And by that time they couldn't go back and reconstruct the real score. And I felt completely in command of the

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situation, an absurdity and I wished I could hear them talking among themselves afterwards. No, it's not unsporting. It's way below that. It's simply unfair of him to do that. _____ in a matter of politeness. Then we had a movie after supper. For the first time I really felt that to be a member of that family would be just great, because he had his built-in little theater. He had a screen, he had room for twenty, thirty people or maybe even less than that. Very comfortable. You slip your finger and the movie starts rolling and you announce what the movie's going to be at suppertime. You all sit down. The machine broke down, and great apologies from the projectionist and that was about all I can remember. I got the feeling that I was in a red ants nest. There were so many people crawling around, and they were so tight among themselves, so many "in" jokes. They hardly had to finish a sentence. One would say something, the other would finish it, and you.... And me, being a non-desirable alien, I felt

that Kathleen had done herself pretty much a disservice by bringing me here, but it's not really my.... I think I was in the Marine Corps then anyway.

STERN: _____

WHITE: Yeah. So I was in uniform, at least I didn't look bad, as usual. And I felt so far away from reality. What I've heard that Jackie used to feel when she went boating with Jack and a whole lot of his cronies would heat up the hull of the boat and she would like a little flower retreat to some distant corner. And my main feeling that weekend, oh, it was only hardly a day or so, was suffocation. And I wasn't.... unaware of the merit. I thought this was a very different way of life from mine and

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probably I could do, people like me would do well to take aboard a good deal of this competitiveness and liveliness and really close friendship. All of those things are alien to most people. You know you have sort of a cool relationship with your best friends. Everything is.... So when I felt suddenly.... In my way I'm facing new things the same as she is. I'm trying to look out of a closed world, too. I wasn't, I didn't have enough sense to already interest me into it, but I was glad to get out. I was really delighted to get out.

STERN: What was the atmosphere like for them? Did you have dinner with the family?

WHITE: Uh humm. Just as you read about it in books. Everybody's got something to say, even the littlest, even the little, I guess that Teddy was the smallest. _____ pretty apt thing to say, ideas, if you don't say something good.... You're not just supposed to make a noise. You're supposed to say something pertinent.

STERN: Then they really want you to spend this time in serious discussion?

WHITE: Yeah. And a lot of laughing and closeknitness. They were like a well-rehearsed team. Hardly any silence, because somebody would throw something in. But there are a lot of stereotypes. That was bothersome. A certain phrase, doesn't have to be completed, it means a laughable situation. Not necessarily malicious, to get somebody, but something they've al talked about, maybe a scene from a movie. For instance, the standard parting was "See you later, alligator." Now that can wear you down after a

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hundred different times. And other things. There was a lot of that little rhyming slang that they have in England.... I can't remember examples. You begin to wince a little bit. Kathleen would do those things from long habit. The general feeling was of a very close-knit bunch and probably were happy to be close-knit. I didn't know, but as an outsider you felt very suffocated and strangled.

STERN: Were there any other guests?

WHITE: I think I was the only one. Maybe Eunice and Jack and Kathleen and Teddy, but there were other people strolling in between meals or for meals. It was a pretty fluid arrangement. Sarge Shrive, he was always around, always. Undoubtedly he was there. I don't remember who else.

STERN: That's fascinating. It wasn't long after this, of course, that Kathleen left for England. There are other who think she left specifically to renew her relationship with Hartington. Did she talk to you about that at all?

WHITE: Yes, yes. I've got a picture that has a little something. This friend that she introduced me to that I went home to get engaged to, Maxie Hogate, she and I talked a lot about Kathleen, and Kathleen talked to me at great length about Hartington and for some reason I called him her fathom lord, fathom, and I can't quite recover what the significance, whether he was like some deep-sea anchor or creature, but the idea was that she had liked him, and I had somewhat the feeling that if there wasn't going to be anything between me and her, then... it wasn't as specific as that. I felt, in looking back afterwards, I did the

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same thing again. I was afraid of marriage I think ,ordinary fear of the responsibilities, and she gave a very strong impression that she didn't passionately love Hartington, but, anything but, she was very fond of him and the great appeal was that he needed her. She, she made him so happy. And she said, "that's a lot." And then I saw her afterwards, after the war, after he was dead, just before she went away again, and she said the same thing, that she'd married him, and it had been as she had thought, that she wasn't wildly, out of control in love, but that she was quite content to make somebody else so clearly happy.

STERN: Yeah, that was mentioned in the Taggart book that you met her in October '45. This was after, of course, she had become a widow. How had she changed since then, the double experience of losing a brother and a husband.

WHITE: Oh, for the better. Talking about that Irishman, I really thought transporting the happiness. I felt, no matter what happens or how long it lasts, the job she's got at this moment with that fellow very few people get in their whole lifetime...

STERN: You're talking about Fitzwilliam.

WHITE: ...yeah, you couldn't think that it was going to, she didn't really think that herself, but what the hell. Remember a story about a house in Bermuda that

was under a magic spell. It rose up only once every hundred years. And one time when he was up a little boy met a little girl the same age, and she took him down to the beach and they played, seahorses came out of the sea. All sorts of wonderful things happened. And they had strawberries and cream on her front porch. And she has very old-fashioned clothes and afterwards as he had to leave, she kept

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calling him little boy, they were the same age, and he said, "When may I see you again?" Her name was Happiness Pennystone. She said, "Little boy, you're lucky to have had happiness for even for an hour." He ran home and his father told him that house _____ It was somewhat the same with Kathleen, that happiness like that, never mind what you pay for it or where it goes, it's a marvelous thing to have. Oh, she was such a burst of joy, because not with me, not with anybody, I think had she had that real, that kind of flaming love. For the moment all her problems were solved. She didn't give a damn about what was necessary to do. She was...

STERN: That was the next point I wanted to raise.

WHITE: ...glad to do it.

STERN: Did you get the impression that she was very distressed about her mother's anger over it, the relationship?

WHITE: She was, yeah. As much as you'd expect, but over it all was, that is, it would have been much harder for her if she'd liked him a lot and had to balance it. There was no balance at all. She had no choice. She couldn't have stayed away from that man, and therefore she was happy. She was sorry that those things had to happen at home, but she was glad that she was so bowled over by love that she didn't have to balance things anymore. It certainly would have ended badly in time, and she probably suspected that.

STERN: Did you have any further contacts with her family after her death?

WHITE: I've never had any with Papa Joe and her mother, except that one time, and then after the war, yeah. I picked up

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with Jack and Eunice and Pat and Jean. Yeah, oh I did go back to Hyannis one time. I forgot exactly what, but Jean and Pat and other.... We used to see them at parties and such, and then I picked up with Jackie separately from Jack. I bet her a dollar she wouldn't marry him. And then at the wedding.... The wedding was odd. I got two invitations, and I wondered about that, and then I suddenly thought, those people have so little overlap that they didn't even bother to compare lists. And, yeah, that's when I got to like him better. And

the thing I remember most vividly was one time in his house. He had a basement, it was about the McCarthy time, probably was, I guess around, I can't remember when it was, but he was a representative, he was a House representative and had to be secure. And one night we were sitting down there. I guess everybody was gone, it was him and me, we were talking and probably talking about his life and times and he said, it was the first time I heard it, he said, "I'm going to go after Lodge's seat in the Senate." And I said, "What do you want to do that for, you're all set. He's powerful in the Senate. He's got a good grip." And he got tight as a drum, and he said, "I'm gonna knock that son-of-a-bitch out of there." Now, what the hell, he's no son-of-a-bitch, he's just another guy. Now when we were talking about later, the battle between his father, the fathers. I never saw such passion in him at all since. It said a lot.

STERN: Did you see him while he was senator or president?

WHITE: Yeah, I saw him as senator, occasionally. After they went to the White House, I'd become a better friend of Jackie, by that time. I didn't want her to marry him at all, and....

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STERN: Why was that?

WHITE: Well, if he'd just stayed senator, she would have had a rotten time with it. But she had a rotten time as a president's wife. That's fine, but she knew what she was doing. But you feel different about, when your friends get that high up. When her son died, I sent her a little quotation for Aeschylus, "God whose law it is that he who learns must suffer, and pain that cannot forget or drop by drop upon the heart and in our sleep and in our own best fight comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God." She wrote back right away, and I've seen her once or twice since, but Bobby, when he was something or other, he used that quote, a while afterwards.

STERN: Yes, that's familiar.

WHITE: It's a beautiful quote, and I thought probably picked it up from her. No, I never saw either one of them. Yes, I did. I saw her occasionally but....

STERN: Well, if you could just sum up your general assessment of Kathleen Kennedy particularly as a Kennedy. How her life was shaped by being a Kennedy.

WHITE: If you tried to imagine her not being a Kennedy, you would have a very mentally active thing. She wasn't all that little, but I kept thinking of her as little, and not by any means bright, but extremely aware. She didn't even like to think deeply about things or even to hear people talk deeply, which was attractive and _____ But she was very, getting to the meat of the matter, particularly as it concerned her or her

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friends, she had practically indomitable good humor, even when she was sick. She probably would have been happier as a peasant, I think as an Irish peasant, not ground down by household chores, but a simple life. The big, rich stuff, the glorious times in England, particular, I think, she might go for because she was a young girl playing, flirting, and all that. So I think when she'd settled down after that that the grand life which those Kennedys never really fitted into, that made her a little restless. She could get quite sharp-tongued about people who had nothing to do except live their lives. She had that Kennedy instinct for duty, for work. They were quite admirable, all of them. That is certainly admirable. They all think you should do a lot. That you've been given a lot, you should in turn do a lot. I think she'd have been an excellent dealer with people in almost any dimension. She'd have been a really good salesman. She was very good at the little column we had, "Did you happen to see?" which you interview somebody in a hurry and get six hundred words. She was so interested in them that out of them would come their secrets and friendships. What else. I guess the most noticeable quality was a real bubbling enthusiasm for everything, everybody and everything.

STERN: Did that continue even after the first marriage or the only marriage...

WHITE: She talked about Billy Hartington very affectionately, but not with the feeling of one who's had just suddenly the whole love taken away because a new love came. I don't know what the secrets were, but the new love had come very fast. And she, she may have kept friends. I doubt if she ever lost a

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friend. Whoever was her friend was going to stay. And she seemed to be like a sponge _____ new people. She made friends with my friends and kept them. The extraordinary thing was that her real innocence of spirit and enthusiasm with plenty of common sense to control herself. She wanted going to get into bad trouble, but I think she was vulnerable. Winston Charleston, you know, a schoolmate of mine, was not the most stable of characters, but she was pledged to him for a while. I told her, he's pretty much of a playboy, and those people are dangerously charming. And she said, well, she'd like to _____ and _____ and try things out. And so, she didn't let it get very far, but she was curious about what that sort of person would be like. And then she, of course, as always came genuinely to like him. She liked anybody.

STERN: That's fascinating. I really appreciate it. Do you have anything to add?

WHITE: Not.... Give me your number so I can call you, in case I think of something.

STERN: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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