

John F. Kennedy—As Jackie Remembers Him

By CLAYTON FRICKEY

Washington, Nov. 22.—By now we have had endless books, countless articles, numberless memoirs and recordings about President John F. Kennedy, who died in Dallas just three years ago today.

They have all added something to our knowledge of him, especially the magnificent histories by Arthur Schlesinger and Ted Sorensen, but it is just possible that his young widow, in a relatively few, unstudied remarks over a decade or so, may have given us the deepest, most revealing insight of all.

Jacqueline Kennedy has never written formally about him, either before or after his death. Their close friends knew of and respected their strong sense of privacy, and their distaste for publicly brandishing their feelings.

Yet over the years, of course, she, like any wife, mused aloud about him from time to time

to relatives, friends, and close associates; and some of these small ephemerides have fortunately been remembered and recorded in a wide scattering of publications.

No one book or article contains very many, so this column today will try to bring together a collection of them from various sources so that readers can share in this special illumination of the late President.

First of all, she disclosed that he saw life as precious and perishable, and not to be frittered away. "He lived at such a pace," she said later, "because he wished to know it all." And she was also to say, "The poignancy of men dying young haunted him."

He did have several close brushes with death as a young man, but he was not bothered when someone sent him a clipping pointing out that since 1840 no President elected in a year ending

in zero had left the White House alive.

Long before that (just after returning from his wedding trip in 1953) he had revealed to his new bride that his favorite poem was Alan Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous With Death."

He may have had premonitions, but he did not brood. He was too busy with life, and an ever larger sense of the world. During those pre-White House years, Sorensen thinks, "Perhaps his wife summed him up best, as an idealist without illusions."

Later, in retrospect, she was to add, "For Jack, history was full of heroes. And if it made him this way—if it made him see heroes—maybe other little boys will see. Jack had this heroic idea of history, the idealistic view."

And in Shakespeare, he preferred the histories, too. "A favorite passage," she tells us, "which he knew by heart, was the St. Crispin's

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Day speech from King Henry V. He told me the words, 'We few, we happy few,' were what Britons said during World War II about the RAF. Sometimes I thought that line, and another—"Shall I think themselves accursed they were not here"—reminded me of all the people who believed in him, and who came to Washington with him."

But, as she also said, "He loved Westerns and Civil War pictures. He was not the candy-and-flowers type, so every now and then he'd give me a book. He gave me 'The Raven' [life of Sam Houston] and also 'Pilgrims Way' by John Buchan."

She took pride in his independent development; "No matter," she said in 1959, "how many older brothers and fathers my husband had had, he would have been what he is today—or the equivalent in another field."

By this time she had been exposed to his restless intelligence for some years, and had been kept busy translating and researching books for him. "He's much more serious," she remarked, "than I thought he was before I married him."

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When he began his campaigning for the Presidency in 1959, she wrote in a note, "I see, every succeeding day I am married to him, that he has what may be the single most important

quality for a leader—an imperturbable self-confidence and sureness of his powers."

Still, she was not in foolish awe of him, especially on subjects she knew better, like children and music. When she was critical of an article on Caroline, she was pointed out to her that JFK and Pierre Salinger thought it was excellent. "Well," she said "they are not very good judges, if you ask me." On music appreciation, she once laughingly said the only score he really understood was "Tail to the Chief."

Looking back, at an exhibit of his mementos to raise funds for the Kennedy Library, she said: "Some people did not know how much he loved old and beautiful things, but it was just that beauty and grace that often moved him the most. He was interested in the classics and even after he became President he gave me so many beautiful pieces of sculpture, which he went and picked out himself . . ."

"There is a Roman Imperial head of a young satyr, which he brought me from Rome. I thought if this were shown in a case next to some carved shore birds from Cape Cod, which I gave to him and which he loved and kept in his office, it would show people a side of him that was rarely seen and about which only a few people knew."

" . . . He changed our world and I hope that people will remember him, and miss him all their lives."