



A TV Interview,

5/23/75

By Benjamin C. Bradlee

Dec. 17, 1962—The President went on television live tonight, answering questions from each network's White House correspondent — Sander Vanocour of NBC, Bill Lawrence of ABC (both friends of Kennedy) and George Herman of CBS.

I watched it at home and felt professionally threatened as a man who was trying to make a living by the written word. The program was exceptionally good, well-paced, colorful, humorous, serious and I felt that a written account would have paled by comparison. After it was over I called Kennedy to tell him all this.

"Well" he told me, "I always said

that when we don't have to go through you bastards, we can really get our story over to the American people."

March 12, 1963—This was the first time we had seen the Kennedys since the dance last Friday, and the ritual rehash took much of our time.

We had again been part of the "in" crowd—we kept telling ourselves—that got asked to come after dinner at the White House again. We had met the Kennedys in the upstairs hall, and Jackie had greeted my wife bluntly, saying, "Oh, Tony you look terrific. My bust is bigger than yours, but then so is my waist." The females imported from New York for the occasion had been spectacular again, and at one point Kennedy had pulled

Rehashing a Party, the Children

me to one side to comment "If you and I could only run wild, Benjy."

Jackie reported that Betty Beale, the society columnist for the Washington Star, had learned about the party—as had anyone with the slightest interest in this kind of stuff—including a rumor that Godfrey McHugh's girl friend (he was the President's Air Force aide) had taken a dip in the pool at midnight and been seen later jumping on the bed in the Lincoln Room. Interestingly, Kennedy didn't question the rumor, but told Jackie to "get after McHugh." Jackie asked whether she should write him or call him, and was told "Call him—tomorrow."

The guest list at these parties is truly fascinating, for it rarely, if ever,

includes members of the Irish Mafia, the Irish Catholic political associates, generally from Boston, who are in many ways closer to Kennedy, personally as well as professionally, than the swingers or the intellectuals or the reporters. This is part of the fundamental dichotomy in Kennedy's character: half the "mick" politician, tough, earthy, bawdy, sentimental, and half the bright, graceful, intellectual "Playboy of the Western World"; and there aren't many people who cross over the dividing line. I suspect, outside his family, Kennedy is as comfortable with Larry O'Brien, Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers as anyone else, but they are rarely mixed with the WASPs. One group feeds off the early, bachelor, political Ken-

nedy, while the other group reflects the later, married, presidential Kennedy.

Jackie regaled us with reports of "two ghastly hours" she had spent earlier that day with three other mothers on duty as teachers' aides in Caroline's school. She could hardly wait to tell us about the adult games which the other mothers told her they played at their parties. One particular favorite, which Jackie illustrated, involved the males tying a spoon to their waists so that it hung from their behind down to a few inches above the floor and then trying to extinguish a lighted candle with the broad end of the spoon. It was apparently

See CONVERSATIONS, C4, Col. 4

TV, a Party, the Children

CONVERSATIONS, From C1

the gyration, plainly obscene, that made it such "fun." The women would apparently stand on upside-down Old Fashioned glasses and try something that would make them fall to the accompaniment of great laughter.

March 26, 1963—The Kennedy children were carrying on during the cocktail hour. John-John — now 2½ years old — has a big thing about coming up to you and whispering a lot of gibberish in your ear. If you throw your head back in mock surprise, John-John roars with laughter until he drools. Kennedy keeps urging me to pick John-John up and throw him in the air, because he loves it so, and because Kennedy himself can't do it because of his back. "He doesn't know it yet," the President said, "but he's going to carry me before I carry him."

Caroline came into the room with her wretched little dog, a Welsh terrier named Charlie. When Kennedy came in a few seconds later, his first words were, "Get that damn dog out of here, Buttons," as he calls Caroline.

The Kennedys seem remarkably good with their children considering what would appear to be the almost insuperable barriers of formality imposed on that relationship by the presidency. They see less of their children, obviously, but that doesn't seem to have interfered with the normal joy and gaiety that attractive children express in themselves and produce in their parents.

The President reacts to both children as if he were still guilty about being away from home so much on the campaign trail. He calls Caroline any night she is away from the White House in Newport or Palm Beach. Right after the inauguration, when Jackie was resting in Florida, JFK put in his nightly call to Caroline, only to be told by nurse Maud Shaw that Caroline had not yet returned from a friend's birthday party. "She's got to start staying home at night,"

Kennedy told Miss Shaw, like the father of a wayward teen-ager.

Ever since the Kennedys realized that Caroline could read, and was in fact reading newspaper and magazine accounts of the family, they have been almost ferociously protective of her. They first realized Caroline's talent and proclivity one night when Kennedy, still a senator but campaigning hard, was soaking in the tub in their Georgetown house. Caroline sailed in, threw a copy of Newsweek with JFK on the cover into the tub, shouting "Daddy," gleefully.

Now in the White House, they both feel Caroline is unspoiled (one night just as we were arriving off the elevator for dinner, Caroline streaked completely unembarrassed through the main upstairs hall, naked as a jaybird, chased by the completely embarrassed Miss Shaw), but they are appalled by the national hunger for news and pictures of her and John-John, and wonder if they can keep them unspoiled. A recent reference on the "Ev and Charlie Show" (a TV regular featuring the Senate and House minority leaders, Everett Dirksen of Illinois and Charles Halleck of Indiana) to Caroline's overexposure has increased the President's concern.

Kennedy is as proud as any other parent of his daughter. Once Jackie framed a particularly gaudy group of finger paintings, blobs of red, yellow and blue, and presented it to the President as the latest effort of their painter friend Bill Walton. Jackie said shyly that she had paid \$600 for it. Kennedy was stunned, not so much by the price as by the far-out abstract turn Walton had apparently taken. When Jackie confessed that the artist was Caroline, he said simply, "Pretty good color."

John-John and JFK quite simply break each other up. Kennedy likes to laugh and likes to make people laugh, and his son is the perfect foil for him.

Saturday: Tragedy in Dallas

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