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BOOK

'Conversations With Kennedy'

By William Gildea

Shortly after the steel industry raised prices in April, 1962, President John F. Kennedy told a family gathering that a steel company official, Thomas Patton, complained that Robert Kennedy, then Attorney General, was wiretapping all steel executives and harassing them through the Internal Revenue Service.

"And, of course," the President said in closing, "Patton was right."

At that point, Robert Kennedy rose and yelled in mock anger, "They were mean to my brother. They can't do that to my brother."

That story, from the April issue of *Playboy*, due on newsstands next week, is taken from a 10,000-word excerpt from a 60,000-word book, "Conversations With Kennedy," by Benjamin C. Bradlee, executive editor of *The Washington Post* to be published by W. W. Norton

in May. *Good Housekeeping* also will publish an excerpt in its April issue.

Bradlee, whose diary presents the private side of the President, knew Mr. Kennedy first as a friend and later as a journalist. Bradlee agreed with the President not to publish any of his notes until at least five years after Mr. Kennedy had left the White House.

Kennedy is depicted as having a salty tongue, an eye for women ("If you and I could only run wild, Benjy"), and insensitivity on occasion toward his wife, Jacqueline, who was "ignored" by the President during his West Virginia primary victory appearance.

The book also tells of Mr. Kennedy's growing dislike of Richard Nixon, "He's a cheap b---; that's all there is to it," Mr. Kennedy is quoted as saying.

After the 1962 California gubernatorial campaign

when Nixon gave his "farewell" press conference, Bradlee wrote, "Kennedy said he thought Richard Nixon was mentally unsound, or, as he once said of him, 'sick, sick, sick.'"

Mr. Kennedy once suggested that Bradlee, then at work on an article about now Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, take a hard look at the then New York governor's war record. "Where was old Nels when you and I were dodging bullets in the Solomon Islands?" Kennedy is quoted. "He must have been 31 or 32. Why don't you look into that?"

According to Bradlee, Mr. Kennedy was pro capital punishment as well as pro abortion; was somewhat jealous of his wife's linguistic talents and took almost an hour's coaching to master the phrase "Ich bin ein Berliner"; and genuinely liked his state in life as

President ("Do you think you could get used to this kind of life? Pretty hard to take, isn't it?").

To Bradlee, the guest list for White House parties was "truly fascinating" because it rarely included Irish Catholic political associates from Boston who were generally closer to him than the "swingers" or intellectuals who were invited. Bradlee sees in this a dichotomy in Kennedy's character: "Half the mick politician, tough, earthy, bawdy, sentimental, and half the bright, graceful intellectual playboy of the Western world. . . . One group fed off the early, bachelor, political Kennedy, while the other group reflected the later, married, presidential Kennedy."

Playboy points out in its introduction to the article "that the backstage Kennedy had different things on his mind from the backstage Nixon."