

SF Chronicle DEC 27 1975

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'One Thing Led to Another'

Joan Hitchcock and JFK

By Blake Green

She was only the milkman's daughter, living in a trailer in Venice, Calif., and he was the millionaire junior senator from Massachusetts. They met at the jukebox of a Malibu bar and, as Joan Hitchcock of San Francisco, oh, so delicately puts it 20 years later: "One thing led to another."

She was not his first, nor his last. It has been rumored that there were, conservatively, hundreds of others. That doesn't bother Mrs. Hitchcock: John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, wasn't her one and only either. "I used to go with Hugh O'Brien," she says, "and, my God, I don't think he missed anyone."

It is the season to be jolly and the Hitchcock mansion on Broadway is dressed for the occasion. Among the poinsettia on the mantle sits a copy of the Robert Berks' bust from the Kennedy Center in Washington—with a slight alteration. The tip of the left ear is chipped—burnt off, perhaps, by all the recent talk and clucking of tongues.

Joan Hitchcock, now 42, has never been silent on the subject of her affair with the former President. There are those who say somewhat unkindly that "she has made a career out of the fact that John Kennedy supposedly laid her."

"The only thing I ever heard about John Kennedy and Joan Hitchcock," says Paul B. (Red) Fay Jr., a friend of the Kennedy family and former Undersecretary of the Navy, "was from Joan Hitchcock's lips. He never discussed her with me."

Other members of the Kennedy administration—Kenneth P. O'Donnell and David Powers (who inscribed a copy of their book "To Joan, who remembers the 'golden days of JFK'"), for example—have denied the stories of presidential dalliances (mostly notably with Judith Campbell Exner).

"They may deny one," Mrs. Hitchcock says quite philosophically, "but they can't deny the whole bunch."

"So I get confused about the dates," she replies to the people who try to poke holes in her story. "It was a long time ago."

It was, by her recollection, just after Kennedy had lost the vice presidential nomination in 1956 to run with Adlai Stevenson against President Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. "I used to ask him, 'Jack, aren't you worried if anyone finds out about you and I?'"

"We all know," the senator would reply, "about Mr. Nixon."

Kennedy, Joan Hitchcock says, was in the company of the Peter Lawfords when she met him and they were among the members of his family (but not his wife, Jacqueline) and friends who were aware of their relationship. "I looked very much like Patricia (Lawford, the president's sister), so when I traveled with him, the press never thought anything of it."

Her parents back in Chicago "knew about him, but they pretended they didn't. They didn't approve basically, I think, because he was Catholic." She chuckled. "And a Democrat."

"It wasn't like seeing a

person every day," she says of their affair. "I'd just meet him places every so often." Kennedy "always paid" the travel money. "I think I'm the only person he ever gave money to (Mrs. Exner says she always paid her own way). He'd call and say 'Joan,' she gives a fair rendition of the familiar Boston twang, "how are you fixed?" Oh, sometimes he'd send me a couple of hundred—nothing too much. But he'd never sign the check or send it personally. He was very cautious about that."

So cautious was Kennedy in his bestowals that the only tangible accompaniment to her memories of the relationship is a tie pin given to him by the mayor of Tucson. In a benevolent gesture

of her own several years ago, she gave the pin to a charity auction, "but no one wanted to buy it, so I bought it back."

The romance lasted three years, she says, ending "for practical reasons. When I met Mr. Hitchcock I decided that I should marry a little security."

Skeptics of the rumors have insisted that it would have been impossible for a man who suffered chronic back pains to have had anything approaching the active sex life attributed to Kennedy. Allusions have been made to the "revolving door" quality of Kennedy's extramarital affairs.

About the first, Mrs. Hitchcock says, "he always traveled

with a board for his bed and he spent a lot of time soaking." Exercise, she says, "helped him forget the pain."

As for the "revolving door," Mrs. Hitchcock says she never had any delusions that the romance would last. "I decided from the beginning that if I wanted to stay around long, I'd be his buddy and friend as well."

Kennedy, she says, "was only one of my lovers." If the number of women attributed to him by Time magazine—1600 by the time he was president—is anywhere near the truth, "I figure this would mean about one new one every 90 days or so." Not bad, of course, but not spectacular either. "I guess my own (score) comes in around 108," she said.



JOAN HITCHCOCK CONTEMPLATES BUST OF KENNEDY
'They may deny one, but they can't deny the whole bunch'

By Joseph J. Rosenthal