



Conversations With **KENNEDY**

*there once was a u. s. president
who loved the life he was leading—and
led it exceedingly well*

memoir **By BENJAMIN C. BRADLEE**

Benjamin Bradlee is executive editor of The Washington Post and was a political reporter and Washington bureau chief for Newsweek during the early Sixties. It was as a personal friend first, and later as a journalist, that Bradlee came to know John F. Kennedy between 1959 and 1963. Bradlee and his wife, Tony, spent many evenings at the White House, socializing and swapping gossip with the Kennedys. Eventually, Bradlee began to make notes of his talks with the President; but it was understood that he would not make them public until at least five years after Kennedy had left the White House. The following excerpts from the conversations are therefore glimpses not of a President in his official role but, in Bradlee's words, "of a President off duty, a President trying to relax, a

President hungry for personal contact otherwise denied him by the burdens and isolation of his lonely office."

TO ANY MAN, but especially to a journalist, it is exciting to consider the prospect that a friend and neighbor might, just possibly, become President of the United States. But it is also vaguely rattling, leading as it does to both subjective and objective considerations of the candidate's talents that normal voters don't make. Since I had lived in Europe from 1951 to 1957, I had no firsthand knowledge of the two campaigns that had set the stage for the 1960 Presidential election. I had missed most of the Joe McCarthy period and all of its national political fallout. I had missed both Stevenson campaigns, and therefore was unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the

hold he had on the minds of most of my colleagues and most of my liberal friends. I had not been around to watch the rebirth of the Republican Party under Eisenhower after 20 years of Democratic rule. And most particularly as far as Kennedy was concerned, I had missed J.F.K.'s brief but abortive emergence as a national political figure when he tried for the Vice-Presidency with Stevenson in 1956. And so when I became a friend of Kennedy's, no historical precedents inhibited me when I first wondered if he might make President; but it seemed unlikely, if only because one's friends didn't (then) even run for President, much less get elected.

Maybe I had communicated some of my doubts to the editors of *Newsweek*, although they had plenty of their own, having covered many more

Presidential elections. Once I arranged to have Kennedy meet with these editors for dinner at the Links Club in New York, and later with some of the editors at the home of my friend Blair Clark. They gave him the hardest of times, slamming questions at him, obviously skeptical of the chances of a man who was too young, too Catholic, too Eastern, too urbane. Crusty Hal Lavine, *Newsweek's* national-affairs editor, who had been covering Presidential campaigns before Kennedy was a junior Congressman, asked him what he was going to do that would convince the skeptics, what he could pull off that would show them that he wasn't "just another pretty boy from Boston and Harvard." Kennedy was enjoying himself, despite the heat he was getting, and he turned to Lavine and stopped

him cold by saying, "Well, I'm going to fucking well take Ohio, for openers." Not only had none of the editors heard a Presidential candidate express himself exactly that way but all of them knew that he was right: Taking Ohio *would* impress the skeptics.

That line never appeared in print. *Newsweek* was a family magazine, after all. But the press generally protected Kennedy, as it protected all candidates, from his excesses of language and his blunt, often disparaging characterizations of other politicians. Kennedy sometimes referred to Lyndon Johnson, truly without hostility, as a "riverboat gambler," and especially as "Landslide," a reference to the time L.B.J. was first elected to the Senate by a majority of 87 votes. He liked Stuart Symington as a human being and felt the 1960 Democratic Convention would most likely turn to Symington if he were stopped, but he stood in less than awe of Symington's intellectual ability and said so often to reporters. Other politicians said the same things about Kennedy, of course, but the press appreciated him for his openness and protected him, while it reacted skeptically to other candidates.

By 1960 I had been a cub reporter, a police reporter, a court reporter, a foreign correspondent and a political reporter for 14 years. I had spent a majority of those years outside Washington, in New Hampshire and in Paris. As a result, I had fewer politicians as friends than most of my colleagues and all of my competitors, and I worried about it. This thing I had going with the junior Senator from Massachusetts was very seductive. He had the smell of success, and my special access to him was enormously valuable to *Newsweek*, in whose Washington bureau I was then working. And I truly liked him: our wives were becoming friends; we ate and drank together.

I never wrote less than I knew about him, filing the good with the bad. But obviously, the information Kennedy gave me tended to put him and his policies in a favorable light, even though all such information was passed through special filters, first by me and to a greater extent by *Newsweek's* editors. If I was had, so be it: I will never be as close to a political figure again.

• • •

Before the inauguration, 1960:

My first vivid memory is of the night of the 1960 West Virginia primary [May 10], the first of the primaries in which Kennedy was not initially a favorite, and the first primary in which his Catholicism would be fairly tested. Kennedy had run in the West Virginia primary against his father's advice and knew that he had to win it to stay alive. He was back in Washington on primary night, after a completely financed and flawlessly organized campaign, whose only minus mo-

ment had come when Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., campaigning for Kennedy in the mountain "hollers," where every shack had a picture of F.D.R. on the wall, had cast tasteless aspersions on Hubert Humphrey's World War Two record.

The Kennedys asked us to sweat out the vote with them at dinner, but dinner was over long before any remotely meaningful results were in. After a quick call to brother Bobby at the Kanawha Hotel in Charleston, we all got into Kennedy's car and drove to the Trans-Lux Theater to see *Suddenly, Last Summer*. Bad omen. It was one of those thrillers whose publicity included a warning that no one would be admitted after the show had started. And no one included the next President of the United States. No manner of identification could change the usher's instructions, so we walked catty-corner across New York Avenue and 14th Street to the Plaza Theater, which then, as now, specialized in porn. This wasn't the hard porn of the Seventies, just a nasty little thing called *Private Property*, starring one Kate Manx as a horny housewife who kept getting raped and seduced by hoodlums. We wondered aloud if the movie were on the Catholic Index of forbidden films (it was) and whether or not there were any votes in it either way for Kennedy in allegedly anti-Catholic West Virginia if it were known that he was in attendance. Kennedy's concentration was absolutely zero, as he left every 20 minutes to call Bobby in West Virginia. Each time he returned, he'd whisper "Nothing definite yet," slouch back into his seat and flick his teeth with the fingernail of the middle finger on his right hand, until he left to call again.

When we got back to their house on N Street, the telephone was ringing. It was Bobby and it was victory—big. Modest war whoops were let fly, a bottle of champagne we had brought—in case—was opened and the plane was ordered up for the flight to West Virginia and a post-midnight victory appearance. Would Tony and I like to go along? Would we ever! Or at least would I ever; Tony didn't like flying. But I knew it was the political story of the week, and I knew that the whole night, plus the flight down, would give me the personal detail and color that editors of newsmagazines crave (and dine out on). Tony got more than she bargained for with a trip so bumpy that Jean Kennedy Smith screamed for her husband, Steve, all the way down. I got exactly what I bargained for, especially in Hugh Sidey's expression, as my opposite number on *Time* watched me get off the plane at the Charleston airport behind the candidate.

Once in West Virginia for the victory appearance, Kennedy ignored Jackie, and she seemed miserable at being left out of things. She was then far from the national figure she later became in her own

right. And this night, she and Tony stood on a stairway, totally ignored, as J.F.K. made his victory statement on television. Later, when Kennedy was enjoying his greatest moment of triumph to date, with everyone in the hall shouting and yelling, Jackie quietly disappeared and went out to the car and sat by herself, until he was ready to fly back to Washington.

The same agonizing wait occurred four months later—this time in the Hyannis National Guard armory waiting through election night and well into the next day for the final verdict of the voters. Journalistically, that week was easy; whoever won, the magazine's schedule was such that the choice of the next cover and my next assignment would be automatic. But personally, however much I had tried to be fair and objective in my reporting of the campaign, I now wanted Kennedy to win. I wanted my friend and neighbor to be President. It wasn't that I didn't like Richard Nixon. I had covered him for several weeks during the campaign and I just didn't know him. I never got close to understanding him. I never got behind that stagy, programed exterior to anything like an inner man that I could understand, or laugh with.

(At the end of the 1962 California gubernatorial campaign, after Nixon gave his "farewell" press conference, having been beaten by Pat Brown, Kennedy said he thought Richard Nixon was mentally unsound, or, as he once said of him, "sick, sick, sick." "Nobody could talk like that and be normal," Kennedy said, referring to the famous remark "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore." But before the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates, J.F.K. didn't really dislike Nixon, much to the annoyance of many card-carrying anti-Nixon friends. But during the 1960 campaign, he came to dislike the Vice-President and once said to me, "Anyone who can't beat Nixon doesn't deserve to be President.")

It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, that where Kennedy was instinctively graceful and natural, Nixon was instinctively graceless and programed. Anyway, I wanted Kennedy to win. When Illinois finally helped put him over the top, Tony and I walked back to the Yachtsman Motel to find a message asking us to go over to the Kennedys' for supper at their house with Bill Walton, the ex-journalist, artist, Kennedy worker and Kennedy friend. We arrived early. Tony great with child, and were greeted by Jackie in the same condition. When Kennedy came downstairs, before any of us could say a word, he flashed that smile and said to the women: "OK, girls, you can take out the pillows now. We won."

Over cocktails, we asked nervously what we should call him; "Mr. President" sounded awesome, and he was no; yet President, but "Jack" was yesterday. He allowed modestly how "Prez" would

(continued on page 170)

Conversations With **KENNEDY**

be just fine for now. (Later, when he was in fact President, we called him Jack only when we were alone with him or with his close friends, and Mr. President whenever anyone else was present.) Over dinner, he told how he had called Chicago's mayor, Richard Daley, while Illinois was hanging in the balance to ask how he was

(continued from page 82)

doing. "Mr. President," Kennedy quoted Daley as saying, "with a little bit of luck and the help of a few close friends, you're going to carry Illinois." Later, when Nixon was being urged to contest the 1960 election, I often wondered about that statement. I was told—by a member of the task force established by Nixon to

decide whether or not to contest it—that the Republicans could well have stolen as many votes in southern Illinois as Daley might have stolen in Cook County.

Sidewalk press conferences by the President-elect in front of his house were common occurrences in the cold of November and December, 1960. Reporters damn near froze on the street between those conferences, and occasionally men



such as Al Otten of *The Wall Street Journal* and the late Bill Lawrence of *The New York Times* and ABC would drop in on us to use the john or the phone or partake of spiritual refreshment. Lawrence once ordered up a very dry double martini in the dead of night and we sent my stepdaughter Nancy Pittman, then nine, in wrapper and slippers, down with it, telling her to give it to the funny-looking man with the Russian karakul hat.

One sidewalk press conference that made all the history books—but that never actually occurred—involved Kennedy's determination to name his brother Attorney General. When I learned it was in the offing, I asked Kennedy how he intended to make the sensitive announcement. "Well," he said, "I think I'll open the front door of the Georgetown house some morning about two A.M., look up and down the street, and if there's no one there, I'll whisper, 'It's Bobby.'"

April 10, 1962

"HE'S A CHEAP BASTARD; THAT'S ALL . . ."

"Don't you ever work anymore?" said the voice on the telephone, and it was the President calling me at 2:30 in the afternoon. I was home in bed with the flu, the first day of work I'd missed since I'd had polio 25 years earlier—and Kennedy knew it.

Turning to the opening-day baseball game at which he had presided the day before (Washington Senators 4, Detroit Tigers 1), we talked about the foul ball off the bat of the Senators' Willie Tasby, which had landed about four feet from the President on the corner of the Senators' dugout. "Boy, that sounded like a gun, it was so close," he said. "Take a look at the picture that ran in *The Washington Post* this morning [apparently a picture that showed all members of the Presidential party scattering under fire]. Dillon [Douglas Dillon, an Eisenhower ambassador to France, then Kennedy's Treasury Secretary] looks like he's on his way up to testify before the Ways and Means Committee in a hurry. The row behind me is absolutely empty. I sent the picture up to Ev Dirksen with an inscription: 'Where were you, Everett?' Dave [Powers] said he would have caught it, if he'd brought his glove."

The reference to the legendary Powers reminded me that *Newsweek* had scheduled a story on him, and I asked the President for some anecdotes about him. Kennedy told a story about Powers' introducing British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (whom Kennedy had met often and knew well) to him as "the greatest prime minister I ever met"—even though he was quite obviously the one and only prime minister Dave had ever met. (Powers regularly referred to the White House as "the greatest White House I ever was in" and later told the President that the Shah of Iran was "my kind of shah.")

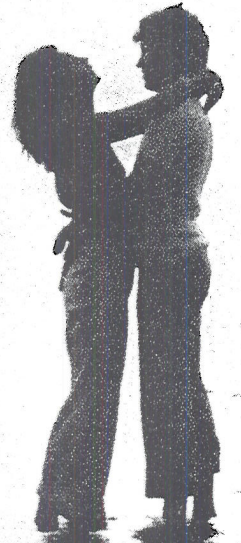
The conversation turned to journalists—one of the President's all-time-favorite subjects. It is unbelievable to an outsider how interested Kennedy was in journalists and how clued in he was to their characters, their office politics, their petty rivalries. I told him that Jim Cannon [former *Newsweek* national editor and special Washington correspondent, now an assistant to Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller] had gone back to New York and that I was in the market for a couple of good young reporters. "How much do you suppose Tom Wicker makes?" the President answered immediately, referring to one of the leading lights of *The New York Times* Washington bureau and Washington journalism. "And how much could you pay? He wrote a damn good story about my background briefing just before Christmas, the only good story written out of here . . . straight, simple, just the way I said it. And then he wrote a hell of a story about me and Senator George Smathers. It would be a hell of a coup for you to stick it to the *Times* by getting him." I asked him what he thought of Tom Ross, then the number-two man in the *Chicago Sun-Times* Washington bureau. The President said, "He may have a bit of Dave Wise [then a political reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*, later its bureau chief and now an author] in him . . . a bit of a prick, but he's good. I like him and I'd hire him."

I told him of the difficulties we were having trying to see Governor Rockefeller for a *Newsweek* story, and he told me that Charlie Bartlett [a close Kennedy friend and then a reporter for the *Chattanooga Daily Times*] had gone all the way to Albany, with an appointment, only to be kept waiting for more than an hour, and then put on his coat and left. "You ought to cut Rocky's ass open a little this week," he suggested. The President asked if we were going to take a look at Rockefeller's war record. It is interesting how often Kennedy referred to the war records of political opponents. He had often mentioned Eddie McCormack and Hubert Humphrey in this connection, and here he was at it again with Rockefeller. "Where was old Nels when you and I were dodging bullets in the Solomon Islands?" he wondered aloud. "How old was he? He must have been 31 or 32. Why don't you look into that?" Kennedy criticized casually the *New York Herald Tribune* and "Dennison," as he called *Tribune* editor John Denson, my former *Newsweek* boss, and said he believed the paper "was being kept alive only to help Rocky's chances in 1964."

I asked him if he had read *Six Crises*, the book by Nixon about the crises in his life, including his defeat by Kennedy two years earlier. "Just the 1960 campaign stuff," Kennedy answered, "and that's all I'm going to read. I can't stand the way he puts everything in Tricia's

New Trojans Plus...

the Ultimate for
the Intimate



New naturally shaped, specially lubricated Trojans Plus condoms are the ultimate in sensitivity. They're super thin and super clinging (body-contoured to hug tight). And they're a saucy golden color to enhance the joy of sex. Look for—ask for Trojans Plus condoms.

NATURALLY SHAPED AND SPECIALLY LUBRICATED FOR EXTRA SENSITIVITY

TROJANS

GOLDEN COLORED

THREE CONDOMS

SPECIAL TRIAL OFFER

Mail \$1.00 for Trojans Plus Sampler of Three


or \$3.00 for a Dozen. Send check or money order made out to Youngs Drug Products Corp. Then buy future needs from your pharmacist.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Youngs Drug Products Corp. 

P.O. Box 5

Dept. PBD Piscataway, N.J. 08854

mouth. It makes me sick. He's a cheap bastard; that's all there is to it."

April 13, 1962

"I JUST WANT TO READ YOU A WIRE"

"It may have been a good week for the Democrats, but not for the U.S.," the President started off, when I called him just before lunch to ask about the steel-price increases. He was really sore. "Now we are going to have a terrible struggle between management and labor—everything we have been trying to avoid in this Administration." Roger Blough [head of U. S. Steel] had just visited Kennedy, and there were rumors before his visit that Big Steel felt it had an understanding on price increases, after settling with the steelworkers. "There was no question of any understanding," Kennedy said, his voice raised. "They had to come down here, because they couldn't just have sat up there and not opened their kissers about the increase . . . in the face of reports that steel was going to have a very good year, in the face of steel working at only 80 percent of capacity. And then come in here two days after the labor contract was signed." Blough was apparently quiet, as always, not rude or excited. Kennedy quoted Blough as starting the conversation by saying, "Perhaps the easiest way I can explain the purpose of my visit is to give you this." Blough then handed him a statement that he had already given to the newspapers. The President was loath to discuss the details of his conversation with Blough. "I just told him he'd made a terrible mistake," he said. Kennedy was bothered at least as much by the way steel increased its prices as by the price increases themselves. "It's the way it was

done," he went on. "It looks like such a double cross. I think steel made a deal with Nixon not to raise prices until after the election. Then came the recession, and they didn't want to raise prices. Then, when we pulled out of the recession, they said, 'Let Kennedy squeeze the unions first, before we raise prices.' So I squeezed McDonald [David McDonald, president of the steelworkers' union] and gave him a good statesmanship leg to stand on with his workers. And they kicked us right in the balls. And we kicked back. The question really is: Are we supposed to sit there and take a cold, deliberate fucking? Is this the way the private-enterprise system is really supposed to work? When U. S. Steel says 'Go,' the boys go? How could they all raise their prices almost to a penny within six hours of one another?" I asked Kennedy about the grand jury that the Attorney General had convened in New York to look into the price increases and reports from the business community that it was just a fishing expedition. "I can't go make a speech like I did [Kennedy, two days earlier, had called the steel-price hike a "wholly unjustifiable and irresponsible defiance of the public interest" and ended his speech by saying, "Some time ago, I asked each American to consider what he would do for his country and I asked the steel companies. In the last 24 hours, we had their answer."] and then sit on my ass," he answered. "They fucked us and we've got to try to fuck them." I said something about how the political ramifications would probably favor the Democrats, who could now run against U. S. Steel—a pretty good opponent for a Democratic candidate—in November.

"But I don't want that," Kennedy answered. "Everything that we have tried is in the other direction. We want the support of business on trade. We want them on the tax bill. I've been breaking my ass trying to get along with these people." Goldberg [Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg] is terribly depressed, the President went on. "He told me, 'Shit, I might as well quit. There's nothing I can do now. We're in for a period in which labor and management are at each other's throats.'"

The President called me back at two P.M., when I was lunching at the Hay-Adams with Ken Crawford [Bradlee's predecessor as *Newsweek's* bureau chief] and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. [the historian and Kennedy aide], and he was madder than ever. "I just want to read you a wire," he started off, while I signaled the waiter urgently for a pencil and a menu to write on. "It's from the FBI office in New York investigating the steel thing. Quote: 'J. S. Tennant, general counsel, United States Steel, informed us today that he is too busy to talk to agents from the Bureau.'" And here my notes break down, but the telegram continued to the effect that Tennant suggested to the FBI agent that he be contacted in New York on April 20 for further discussions as to when certain steel-company executives might be interviewed by FBI personnel. "Who the fuck do they think they are?" the President asked. "It just shows how smart they think they are and how they think they can screw the Government."

The President was about to leave by helicopter from the White House lawn to go on maneuvers with the Marines, and then on to Palm Beach. But his anger was running over. I asked him about the charges that were being made about his vindictiveness against the steel companies. Kennedy said he'd heard all about them, but asked, "What would you have us do? We can go at this thing 40 different ways. The point is, I can't just make a charge and then walk away. That's when they say, 'We beat 'em.' They used us, that's all, and what can we do? We can't just walk away and lie down. We're going to tuck it to them and screw 'em."

May 15, 1962

"TO BILLIE SOL BRADLEE" OR
"BETTER NOT LET THAT ONE
OUT OF HERE"

The President seemed jumpy and uncomfortable at dinner, perhaps because there were more guests than usual: Chuck and Betty Spalding [old friends of J.F.K.'s], Mr. and Mrs. Edward A. McDermott [director of the Office of Emergency Planning and his wife], Frederick Loewe [the composer of Lerner and Loewe fame], Bill Walton and Helen Chavchavadze [also friends of the Kennedys] and ourselves.

Topic A was Billie Sol Estes, the boy



"I think they'll take the hot-dog competition hands down."

wonder from Pecos, Texas, who made a fortune in anhydrous ammonia and then got himself indicted and convicted for conspiring to defraud major investment firms by selling them nonexistent mortgages on nonexistent farm equipment. Estes had been loosely tied to Johnson, and the *New York Herald Tribune* had come up with a picture of Kennedy at his inaugural address, inscribed to Estes by the President. Kennedy resented the *Tribune* picture and was making no effort to hide his resentment. *Newsweek* had run the same picture and we were included in his general unhappiness. "Sixty thousand copies of that document were distributed by the Democratic National Committee," he said aggressively, "none of them actually signed by me, none of them sent to anyone with my particular knowledge." He said the butler was going to bring me in a present from him, and the butler soon did just that. It was the same picture of the President at his inaugural address. During dinner, he hauled out a pen and inscribed it "To My Good Friend Billie Sol Bradlee, With Best Regards, John F. Kennedy," and gave it to me right there. But about ten minutes later, as we were getting up from dinner, the President asked for it back, saying, "We better not let that one out of here, I guess."

"But how do you avoid things like the Billie Sol Estes case?" he speculated afterward. "You kick them out as soon as you find them, but how do you find them? And God knows how many there are." (The first Kennedy "scandal," such as it was, involved the jovial and able Frank Reeves, Kennedy's "minorities man" during the campaign, and a professor of law at Howard University. Frank had forgotten to pay his income taxes, it had been revealed in the newspapers, at a time when he was still on the Kennedy payroll. Kennedy had announced that Reeves would leave the White House immediately, but I had seen him over there a few days after the announcement. I spoke to the President on the telephone a day later and asked him when Reeves was in fact going to leave. "He's left," Kennedy said, sure of himself. I told him how I'd seen him 24 hours earlier. There was a pause and I could hear the President ask O'Donnell [Kenneth O'Donnell, administrative aide and advisor to J.F.K.], "Is Frank Reeves still around here?" Another pause, then Kennedy back to O'Donnell: "Get his ass out of here, tonight.")

"These Government departments are like icebergs," Kennedy continued. "People have been dug in there for years." He reaffirmed, convincingly, his confidence in his Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, whose bailiwick included Estes, and his confidence in Freeman's toughness, integrity and incorruptibility.

Conversation turned to his remark



One beautiful
smoking experience.

If you've never
had one, have an
A&C Panetela.

Uniquely blended from imported and domestic tobaccos to give you real flavor in a great shape, A&C Panetela—in either light or dark wrapper—is one beautiful smoking experience.



Antonio Y Cleopatra.



"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

about all businessmen's being sons of bitches, reacting to the news of the steel-price rise. Wallace Carroll had reported in *The New York Times* of April 23 that the President had said to his advisors on April 10, "My father always told me that all businessmen were sons of bitches, but I never believed it till now." The President said that night, "I said sons of bitches, or bastards, or pricks. I don't know which. But I never said anything about *all* businessmen. And, furthermore, I called Reston [James Reston, then Washington bureau chief of *The New York Times*] and Reston knows this, but he didn't have the guts to change the original story." The President went on to say that it was bankers and steel men that his father hated, not all businessmen. But he added that it didn't make much difference now whether or not he said all businessmen. The businessmen—"wherever you are"—thought he had, and that was fine with him.

Kennedy fingered his elaborately scripted place card at one point during dinner and said out of the blue that he had a collection of these cards signed by every head of state who had been honored at a White House dinner. The collection then amounted to some 60 cards, he said, as pleased as a small child talking about his bug collection.

I sat next to Ann Gargan, the Kennedy cousin who had made a life's work out of taking care of the President's father. She painted a pathetic picture of "Uncle Joe," saying that apparently his mind worked perfectly—or almost perfectly—but that he still could not talk after his stroke. She told me she telephoned him at least once a day whenever she was away from him, which was not often. Apparently she just rambled on, while he just mumbled unintelligible noises.

June 14, 1962

"BOBBY AND I SMILE SARDONICALLY"

The President had been in a particularly gay and effusive mood, while other Kennedys—Bobby, Pat Lawford, Ethel and Jean—had been critical in one way or another of the previous week's stories, especially mine, about Teddy's nomination for the Senate from Massachusetts. They all felt any discussion of a Kennedy dynasty was unfair. The occasion was a party given for the President by Jean and Steve Smith. Jean was particularly horrified when I told her *Newsweek* was planning a Kennedy-dynasty cover story—with pictures of J.F.K., Bobby and Teddy on the cover—if Teddy won the primary and the election. She was truly appalled and asked if I'd still do the story if the President

refused to cooperate. I was so sure he would cooperate that I agreed to her suggestion that we ask him for the family line on whether or not the Kennedy dynasty was a legitimate area of inquiry for a responsible national newsmagazine. Jean bet me he would have some qualification and she was right, but not the way she had thought. "After he's elected," Kennedy said. "The idea's not only legitimate but fascinating."

About 10:30 P.M., the President stood up to make a toast, excusing himself for beginning in Jean's absence (she returned a few minutes later, announcing to all concerned, "Sorry, kid, I had to go peeps"), but he said he had to watch the rebroadcast of his news conference at 11. He wanted to make a toast to the Attorney General, he said, and went on to describe how he had been talking that afternoon with Tom Patton, president of Republic Steel. "I was telling Patton what a son of a bitch he was," the President said with a smile. He waited with that truly professional sense of timing instinctive to the best comedians, and went on. "And he was proving it. Patton asked me, 'Why is it that all the telephones of all the steel executives in the country are being tapped?' And I told him that I thought he was being wholly unfair to the Attorney General and that I was sure that it wasn't true. And he asked me, 'Why is it that all the income-tax returns of all the steel executives in the country are being scrutinized?' And I told him that, too, was wholly unfair, that the Attorney General wouldn't do any such thing. And then I called the Attorney General and asked him why he was tapping the telephones of all the steel executives and examining the tax returns of all the steel executives . . . and the Attorney General told me that was wholly untrue and unfair." And then another Stanislavsky pause. "And, of course, Patton was right."

At this point, Bobby rose from his table and proclaimed in mock anger: "They were mean to my brother. They can't do that to my brother."

There was a great deal of conversation about Teddy. The President wanted to hear all the stories from Springfield—preferably in dialect. At one point, Bobby asked me to rise to drink a toast to Teddy, on the grounds that I was the only one present who had been in Massachusetts when he won the nomination. The Kennedys—not J.F.K. or Jackie—have a habit of urging people to get on their feet and make inappropriate speeches, only to drown them out with catcalls when they do. It seemed to me then that they were somehow trying to get me to commit myself to his candidacy and more generally to his virtue, and I didn't want to play that game. The President made a big point of saying that

of phony liberals" and expressed concern that it might help Nixon, even though he felt that Nixon was "beyond saving" politically. He said he thought Nixon was "sick."

January 30, 1963

"SOME PIPELINE I HAVE INTO THE WHITE HOUSE"

Douglas and Phyllis Dillon gave a dinner dance, with the Kennedys as guests of honor. At one point in the evening, I spotted the President and Teddy Kennedy standing together, with Teddy doing all the talking and the President roaring with laughter.

"Some pipeline I have into the White House," Teddy said to me when I joined them. "I tell him 1000 men out of work in Fall River, 400 men out of work in Fitchburg. And when the Army gets that new rifle, there's another 600 men out of work in Springfield. And you know what he says to me? 'Tough shit.'"

February 11, 1963

"17,000 SOVIET TROOPS IN CUBA" AND "27,000 U. S. TROOPS IN TURKEY"

We had dined alone with the President the night before. Jackie had not appeared. We saw a dreadful movie about some Englishman in a German prison camp and then just before midnight walked around the Ellipse in the cold, pouring rain. Counting all the Secret Service men, we made up a task force, but no one recognized the President.

Newsweek was planning another cover story on Bobby and, as usual, I asked the President for help during dinner. He

told two shocking stories about Bobby that I'd never heard before. The first involved an official of the Teamsters Union, allegedly a pal of Teamsters chief Jimmy Hoffa, who had been convicted, sentenced and then suddenly started to "sing." He was apparently beginning to tell all when he was suddenly taken ill and rushed to the hospital, where it was found that he was suffering from acute arsenic poisoning. The President said the Teamsters had apparently heard that this man was squealing and had quite simply tried to poison him. The second anecdote concerned the recent discovery by the Justice Department of some hoodlum who reported he had been hired by the Teamsters, given a gun fitted with a silencer and sent to Washington with what the President said were orders to kill the Attorney General. I found this one a little hard to believe, but the President was obviously serious. Kennedy said Bobby was anxious that the first story not get out, for fear that it would so terrify all potential anti-Hoffa Teamsters that the anti-Hoffa cause would be lost.

We talked a lot about Cuba. The President said that the presence of 17,000 Soviet troops in Cuba, 90 miles from the U. S., was one thing viewed by itself, but it was something else again when you knew there were 27,000 U. S. troops stationed in Turkey, right on the Soviet border, and they had been there some years. He warned me against releasing this information. Obviously it was classified, and just as obviously it would be politically suicidal for him publicly to

equate the two. "It isn't wise, politically, to understand Khrushchev's problems in quite this way," he said quietly.

March 12, 1963

"IF YOU AND I COULD ONLY RUN WILD, BENJY"

It was the first time we had seen the Kennedys since the dance the previous Friday, and the ritual rehash took much of our time. We had again been part of the "in" crowd—we kept telling ourselves—that was asked to go to the White House after dinner. 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 me to one side to comment, "If you and I could only run wild, Benjy."

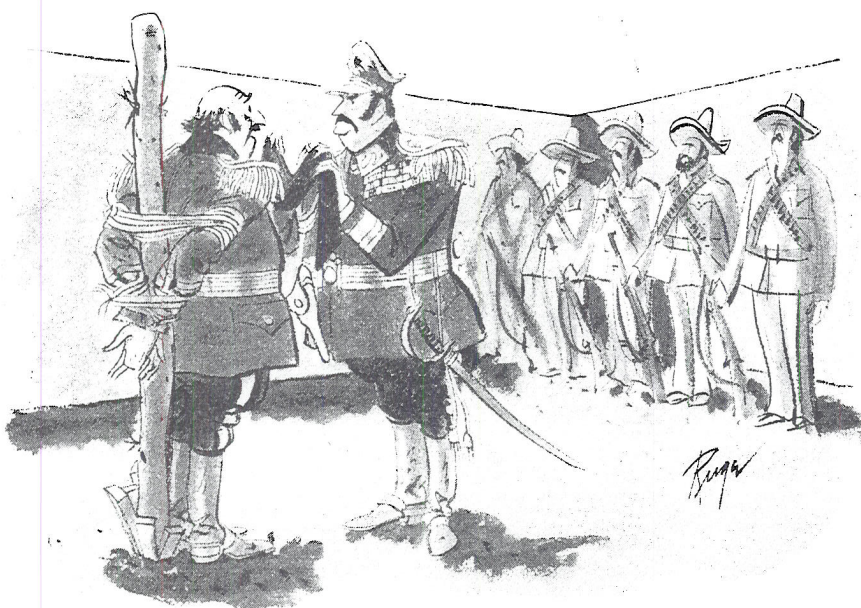
Jackie reported that Betty Beale, the society columnist for the *Washington Star*, had learned about the party—as had anyone with the slightest interest in that kind of stuff—including a rumor that Air Force aide Godfrey McHugh's girlfriend had taken a dip in the pool at midnight and had been seen later 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." Kennedy revealed that for the first time, they had someone especially assigned to count the booze. Apparently, at an earlier dance, the Kennedys had been charged for 90 bottles of assorted spirits and were convinced that they were being stolen blind.

The guest list at those parties was truly fascinating, for it rarely, if ever, included members of the Irish Mafia, the Irish Catholic political associates, generally from Boston, who were in many ways closer to Kennedy, personally as well as professionally, than the swingers or the intellectuals or the reporters. That was 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 weren't many people who crossed over the line. I suspected, outside his family, Kennedy was as comfortable with Larry O'Brien, O'Donnell and Powers as with anyone else, but they were rarely mixed with the WASPs. One group fed off the early, bachelor, political Kennedy, while the other group reflected the later, married, Presidential Kennedy.

March 21, 1963

"KISS-AND-TELL JOURNALISM"

Kennedy had just returned from Costa Rica, and the President's enthusiasm for



"If I thought you were serious about wanting a change of government, I'd have resigned!"



"But, honey, I'm only giving equal rights to all women."

the trip still sparkled when we saw him and Jackie for dinner alone at the White House. His reception had been fantastic, he said, and he explained it by his youth, by the fact that he was a Democrat and a Catholic, and by Jackie's popularity; she had delivered several well-publicized speeches in Spanish during a previous trip to Latin America. (Kennedy found it intolerable that he didn't have the facility for languages that others had, and his pride in Jackie's linguistic talents was tinged with jealousy and bewilderment. His French could only be described as unusual. One French friend said he spoke it "with a bad Cuban accent," while another said, "He apparently didn't believe in French verbs, much less pronounce them correctly." Just before his trip to Berlin in June 1963, he spent the better part of an hour with the Vreelands [Frederick "Fredsy" Vreeland, a young foreign-service officer and the son of *Vogue* editor Diana Vreeland, and his

wife] before he could master "*Ich bin ein Berliner.*")

He said he felt his inaugural address, letting the world know that the torch had been passed to a new generation, meant more to Latin Americans than to anyone else. I asked him why he thought Nixon's trip to Latin America had failed. The visit was badly prepared, Kennedy answered. "Nixon represented the wrong party in F.D.R. terms, and anyway, Nixon is Nixon."

After much prodding from Tony and pretty much to everyone's relief, I told the President for the first time that I was keeping a kind of diary of the times we met or talked. I got my opening when the conversation at dinner turned to Emmet Hughes's book on Eisenhower, *Ordeal of Power*, which was being criticized as kiss-and-tell journalism. I was convinced Kennedy knew I was keeping some kind of record and

obviously did not object. I was not so sure about Jackie, who was much more nervous and easily distraught by that kind of thing. I told him that Tony had made me worry about not telling him, especially whenever the subject came up of those "bastard" historians who "are always there with their pencils out." I told him I certainly would not write anything about him as long as he was alive without his permission. Kennedy said there was no reason to wait that long. He insisted that he was glad that someone was keeping some kind of record of the more intimate details without which the real story of any administration cannot be told. I was not convinced he knew how intimate those details might get—though I suspected that Jackie did—but that's for another decade. Anyway, we agreed that I would not publish anything about our association with them

(continued on page 182) 177

Conversations With **KENNEDY**

without his permission for at least five years after they left the White House.

April 2, 1963

"BOY, THIS IS A BIG GOVERNMENT"

The dinner invitations we got to the White House came from Evelyn Lincoln, and they came late—almost always the same day, in the morning if we were lucky, but often as late as five or six P.M. Since we didn't go out much at night, it wasn't much of a problem. The most recent invitation came just after six P.M., and we ate with the Kennedys alone.

I'd spent a good part of the day working on a story about the use of lie detectors by the Pentagon. The President hadn't heard about it and wanted all the details. Civilian and military officials in the Defense Department were being asked to take lie-detector tests in the course of an investigation into who

(continued from page 177)

leaked—to Dick Fryklund, the Washington Star's Pentagon correspondent—an Air Force report on how unnecessarily rough the investigators on the McClellan committee had been. Kennedy immediately called Pierre Salinger and asked him to call Eugene Zuckert [Secretary of the Air Force] and get him to knock the investigation off. Zuckert called the President a few seconds later and Kennedy was very curt with him on the phone. "Let's stop doing it to ourselves, Mr. Secretary," he said. "This is hardly a question of national security, is it? Whoever leaked the report was trying to do us a favor, as far as I can see." When he hung up, Kennedy said Zuckert claimed it was routine in an investigation of that kind to ask someone at the end of the questioning if he would be willing to take a lie-detector test.

"Boy, this is a big Government," the President said, getting out of his rocker

with his arms flailing as he imitated a man trying to plug too many holes in one dike. "You push a button marked 'investigate,' and the whole giant machinery starts moving, and then you can't stop it." Salinger then called back and they talked briefly about the Pentagon spokesman, the kind and gentle Arthur Sylvester. "Arthur's days are numbered," Kennedy said. "I'll tell you that. He's a marvelous guy, but the trouble is he doesn't have the relationship with McNamara that I have with Salinger, where he can come busting into my office whenever he has to."

Somewhere during the evening we got on the subject of pregnancy and I asked Jackie if it was true that she was pregnant. She said she was not, but we thought she was. We talked about how many more children Bobby and Ethel might have, and out of the blue the President volunteered the advice that Tony and I should not have any more children and suggested to me. "You ought to get yourself cut."

From there we jumped somehow to the question of capital punishment. It turned out we were all against capital punishment except the President. I asked him about the Catholic precept against taking a life, including by abortion, and he said that he saw no conflict. He said he was all for people's solving their problems by abortion (and he specifically told me I could not use that for publication in *Newsweek*), and he didn't seem to equate execution with the taking of a life in the doctrinal sense.

The President was enthusiastic about his visit with King Hassan of Morocco. "He and the shah, both of them playboys at one time," he said, "are so serious now that they are kings. They must be overcompensating." Hassan had given the President a gold saber studded with 50 diamonds. He unsheathed a similarly jeweled sword that the shah had given him, I unsheathed the Hassan saber and we struck a dueler's pose, brandishing thousands of dollars' worth of jeweled cutlery as if they were golf clubs.

May 29, 1963

"COME IN YACHTING CLOTHES"

The invitations to the President's birthday party, a cruise down the Potomac on the Sequoia, had read, "Come in Yachting Clothes," which meant white pants as far as I was concerned. In addition to the Kennedys, the guests included Bobby and Ethel, Teddy, a *Last Hurrah* type from Boston named Clem Norton, who had been a friend and coat holder of Honey Fitz, the Shrivvers, Bill Walton, Mary Meyer, a woman introduced only as Enid, Lem Billings, Senator Smathers and his wife, Red and Anita Fay, Charlie and Martha Bartlett, the actor David Niven and his wife, Hjordis,



"That lecture on V.D. was very informative—especially the part on how you can get it."

Jim Reel, Fifi Fell and ourselves. A three-piece band played all night.

After cocktails on the lantail, with thunder and lightning omens for the rains to come, dinner was served below. There was a bunch of toasts, including Fay's vaudeville act in which he sang, if that's the word, *Hoovay for Hollywood*. That act panicked the Kennedys, and they'd heard it a hundred times. No one else quite understood why. Throughout the toasts, the Kennedys heckled whoever was on his feet with boos, catcalls, cheers—mostly boos. The boor of the evening turned out to be Norton, whom Teddy had brought along at the last minute and who did endless imitations of Honey Fitz that meant very little to anyone who was neither a Fitzgerald nor a Kennedy.

One of the guests got more stewed by the hour, until at midnight he was literally stumbling over the presents piled in front of the President. There was a moment of stunned silence as he lurched forward and put his shoe right through a beautiful, rare old engraving that was Jackie's birthday present to her husband. It had cost more than \$1000 and Jackie had scoured galleries to find it, but she greeted its destruction with that veiled expression she gets on her face, and when everyone commiserated with her over the disaster, she just said, "Oh, that's all right. I can get it fixed."

Kennedy had not gotten the word that the twist was passé; any time the band played any other music for more than a few minutes, he passed the word along for more Chubby Checker. He was also passing the word all night to the Sequoia's captain. Apparently through an abundance of caution in case he wasn't having a good time, Kennedy had ordered the skipper of the Sequoia to bring her back to the dock at 10:30 p.m., only to be ordered back out "to sea"—which meant four or five miles down the Potomac. This happened no fewer than four times. Four times we moored and four times we unmoored. The weather was dreadful most of the evening, as one thunderstorm chased us up and down the river all night, and everyone was more or less drenched. Teddy was the wettest and, on top of everything, mysteriously lost one leg of his trousers sometime during the night.

May 30, 1963

"YOU THINK YOU COULD GET USED
TO THIS KIND OF LIFE?"

We gathered on the south lawn of the White House about noon, all of us a touch hung over from the gaiety of the night before, for a helicopter ride to Camp David, our first ride in the President's chopper and our first trip to Camp David. With us were the Nivens; Caroline; John-John; their nurse, Miss Shaw; Clipper, the German shepherd dog; Captain Tazewell Shepard, the President's

naval aide; and a flock of Secret Service men.

The Nivens were charming, and though they had known none of us before the previous night, it was like a gathering of old friends. On the way up in the helicopter, the President turned to me and said, "Do you think you could get used to this kind of life? Pretty hard to take, isn't it?"

When we arrived, each of us went to small individual cabins. Ours was Maple, with a living room, one very small bedroom, one large bedroom and two baths. We rallied ten minutes later in front of the main lodge, and Kennedy drove us all to a skeet-shooting range near the heliport. The President shot first, and he was as lousy as we all turned out to be. He hit about four of the first 20, but no one else did much better. Niven made us all laugh as he explained his theory that the secret of skeet shooting was in the voice one used to order up the clay pigeons. Whereupon he would whisper "High tower, pull" . . . and miss, then shout "Low tower, pull," and miss again.

We then went for a swim in the pool—heated, of course. The President gave his bathing trunks to Niven and went in his skivvies. He wore his back brace, even for the short walk from the dressing room to the pool. His back had been giving him real trouble, he admitted, but was almost "miraculously better" the night before and that day. Jackie told us that she had asked Dr. Janet Travell, the back wizard, for some shot that would take Kennedy's back pain away, if only just for the birthday party. She had said there was such a shot, but it would remove all feeling below the waist. "We can't have that, can we, Jacqueline?" the President had ruled.

September 12, 1963

"NO PROFILE NEEDED HERE, JUST COURAGE"

The President and I played golf one afternoon at the Newport Country Club, and that was always a harrowing experience for me. In the first place, if you play golf with a President, you are apt to play at some fancy country club whose code of dress requires clothes that I do not have in my wardrobe . . . like golf shoes, for openers. As a result, I hit off the first tee in old sneakers, and I felt like three down before I hit a shot. In the second place, if you play golf with a President, you are dead sure to be watched by a crowd of people who either play golf better than you do and therefore laugh when you shank the ball, or line the roads and shout to be recognized by your partner. In any case, that's another two down. In the third place, there are Secret Service men all around you, carrying guns in dummy golf bags, and that doesn't do anything for your game. And finally, if you played golf with this President, his patience was so limited that

you could never stop to look for a lost ball, and that didn't suit my game at all.

But Kennedy was fun to play golf with, once you got out of range of the sightseers, primarily because he didn't take the game seriously and kept up a running conversation. If he shanked one into the drink, he could let go with a broad-A "Bahstard," but he would be teeing up his next shot instantly. With his opponent comfortably home in two and facing a tough approach, he might say "No profile needed here, just courage," a self-deprecating reference to his book *Profiles in Courage*. When he was losing, he would play the old warrior at the end of a brilliant career, asking only that his faithful caddie point him in the right direction and let instinct take over. He could play TV golf commentator as he hit the ball, saying, "With barely a glance at the packed gallery, he whips out a four iron and slaps it dead to the pin." He was competitive as hell, with a natural swing, but erratic through lack of steady play. Another time Kennedy and I were playing at Hyannis Port with Ethel, and she was about seven months pregnant. I had not played golf for a couple of years, as I remember, and I had never played that course. The stakes were again ten cents a hole. Once I asked Ethel what club she thought I should use, because I was unfamiliar with the course and unsure of my own judgment. She suggested a five iron and I whacked it pretty good, only to see it go sailing way over the green. I turned around to the sound of gales of laughter from Ethel and the President. She wanted to win so badly she had purposely suggested too much club.

That afternoon, I teed up trembling at unheard snickers but hit the longest, straightest goddamn drive of my life ("Jesus, Benjy," the President said, "I never saw anyone hit a ball that far on this hole. You must be hungry"), but it was so far I couldn't find it and Kennedy wouldn't help me look for it. So I lost the first hole. Later in the round I actually sank a five iron, but instead of allowing me to pause to relish and to be congratulated (even cheered by the people lining the road?), the President simply picked up his ball and raced to the next tee. It really isn't fair.

October 22, 1963

"MAYBE YOU'LL COME
WITH US TO TEXAS NOW"

I had been almost an hour late to dinner with the Kennedys. We hadn't been asked until almost seven o'clock, and I'd had a television-panel thing to do that I couldn't—and didn't want to—get out of.

The President was in his shirt sleeves when I arrived and apparently had been telling Jackie and Tony what a miserable day he'd had, with everything going wrong from beginning to end. The latest

news involved the refusal of the Birmingham, Alabama, police department to hire Negro cops. Another problem involved Manny Celler [Emanuel Celler, the New York Congressman and chairman of the House Committee on the Judiciary] and the civil rights bill in the Judiciary Committee, where the liberals were trying to report out a bill that the President felt "gives me a bad bill, and only a fair issue."

Chief topics for discussion that night were Jackie's recent trip to Greece and a stay on Aristotle Onassis' yacht, and Bobby Baker, the secretary to the Senate majority and a protégé of Johnson's. Baker was under all kinds of investigation and had just been sued, in a civil suit, for taking a bribe in connection with a vending-machine franchise in a plant of a company that handled a lot of Government contracts.

Kennedy was unwilling to knock Baker, saying, "I thought of him primarily as a rogue, not a crook. He was always telling me he knew where he could get me the cutest little girls, but he never did. And I found that when I would call him up to get an accurate count on a vote, I'd get a straight answer."

On the question of his Vice-President, whose close ties to Baker were politically embarrassing to the Kennedy Administration, the President said he felt sure Johnson had not been "on the take since he was elected." Before that, Kennedy said, "I'm not so sure." I asked him about reports *Newsweek* had heard that L.B.J.

was using airplanes supplied to him free by the Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation. "He's flying on an Air Force jet now," he replied, clearly implying that he, too, had heard about the Grumman planes, but he offered no information or explanation. "I'm not after Bobby Baker," he repeated, and then he talked again about how he felt that Baker was more rogue than crook. As for dumping Johnson from the ticket in 1964, the President said, "That's preposterous on the face of it. We've got to carry Texas in '64, and maybe Georgia."

The Baker conversation led us into a discussion of morality in government generally and the new, sophisticated immorality, which less often consisted of anything so bold as cash, but rather the hiring of a Senator's or a Congressman's law firm, for exorbitant fees and no work, or the steering of Government business to firms in which elected officials had a financial stake. We talked about taxes and who paid how much. The President stunned us all by saying that J. Paul Getty, the oil zillionaire who is reputedly the richest man in the world, had paid exactly \$500 in income taxes the previous year and that H. L. Hunt, the Texas oil zillionaire who must have been the richest American, had paid only \$22,000 in income taxes the previous year. When I told him that was what Tony and I had paid in taxes that year, he said, "The tax laws really screw people in your bracket, buddy boy."

I asked him, since he had obviously

done some research on the tax payments of millionaires, how much shipbuilding magnate Daniel Ludwig had paid. He smiled but he didn't bite, and then he said that all that tax information was secret and it was probably illegal for him to know or at least for him to tell me. I told him if he ever wanted to give a tax-reform bill the last little push, all he had to do was let me publish that kind of information. He paused and then said, "Maybe after 1964," a phrase that was cropping up more and more.

On the subject of Onassis, much of the conversation was across the table between Jackie and Tony. There had been substantial press criticism of Jackie's trip. The President had promised it to her as a way of recuperating from the hammer blow of the death of her last child, but the papers had been full of stories about the "brilliantly lighted luxury yacht," "gay with guests, good food and drinks," "lavish shipboard dinners," "dancing music," "a crew of 60, two *coiffeurs* and a dance band." And Republican Congressman Oliver Bolton of Ohio had made a speech on the floor of the House criticizing the presence aboard Onassis' yacht of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., who was the Undersecretary of Commerce and, as such, was in a position to influence the relations between the Greek shipping tycoon and the U. S. Maritime Administration.

Jackie told us that Onassis "was an alive and vital person" who had started from nothing, who had not wanted to make the trip with Jackie and her sister, Lee Radziwill (and the Roosevelts and Princess Irene Galitzine, the fashion designer, among others). She told us how she had insisted that she would not accept this man's hospitality and then not let him come along. It was an act of kindness, she said. "Poor Franklin didn't want to go along at all," she continued. "He said he was working on a new image and a trip like this wouldn't do him any good, but I persuaded Jack to call Franklin and ask him to go with me. I really wanted him as a chaperone." Jackie seemed a little remorseful about all the publicity, including the *Newsweek* story, which she felt went a little heavy on high-jinks. She said J.F.K. was being "really nice and understanding."

The President did reveal that he had insisted that Onassis now not come to the United States until after 1964, the best evidence that he thought the trip was potentially damaging to him politically. But he noted that what he called "Jackie's guilt feelings" might work to his advantage.

"Maybe you'll come with us to Texas now next month," he said with a smile.

And Jackie answered: "Sure I will, Jack."



"No kidding? Wow! I don't think I've ever met a dildo tycoon before!"