

# 'How I Remember Kennedy'

By CY RICE

The late President Kennedy will be remembered by this writer for his brilliant, eager mind, of course, but even more for his incredible charm, his quick Irish wit and his life-loving, happy disposition.

Though I met and talked to him on his first visit here as a freshman congressman in 1947, in 1957 and 1958, it was not until his three day tour in April 1959 that I got to know him at all well.

Ira Kapenstein, then a reporter for The Milwaukee Journal and now aide to Postmaster General Gronouski, accompanied Mr. Kennedy on that tour. Its purpose was obviously to test the Wisconsin climate for his unannounced candidacy for president.

It was an open secret, of course, that he intended to run in 1960 but it was not certain

he would enter the Wisconsin Democratic presidential primary against Senator Humphrey (Dem., Minn.), who was very popular with Wisconsin Democrats.

In a news conference at the Milwaukee Press club we all tried to make then Senator Kennedy admit he planned to run for president and it was this purpose which brought him to Wisconsin. But Mr. Kennedy cleverly evaded us.

I had met Ted (Theodore C.) Sorensen, who was special adviser to the president, the month before at a midwest Democratic conference, and I insisted that Sorensen had been here to sample the climate, too. But Mr. Kennedy pleasantly demurred.

Sorensen had been somewhat alarmed because the president's brother, Robert Kennedy, then counsel to the McClellan senate

a news conference that efforts by both sides, labor and management, had been made to intimidate him.

I recall taking Sorensen in a taxi to the old Sentinel building so he could see how the wire services were playing the story, and they played it big. Sorensen appeared concerned as to the effect this would have on Mr. Kennedy.

That triangular tour by plane and auto went up the lake shore to Sheboygan, then by plane to Beloit, Janesville, Madison, up to Green Bay, then by motor to Appleton for a Saturday night talk at a church hall. Then we went back to Green Bay where the whole Kennedy party, which included 15 or 20 eastern newsmen and magazine writers, boarded the plane which dropped Kapenstein and me in Milwaukee.

I distinctly recall that in Appleton, as Mr. Kennedy, Sorensen and I stood at an auto, Mr. Kennedy asked, "When shall we three meet again?" Sorensen, always apt with a quotation, gave the line of the three witches in Shakespeare's "Macbeth" that it would be in "thunder, lightning and in rain," or approximately that.

During that trip all the reporters had time to converse with Mr. Kennedy in auto and plane. I recall asking him how his grandfather John Fitzgerald got the nickname "Honey Fitz." Mr. Kennedy opined that it was from his sweet tenor voice in a Boston quartet that featured "Sweet Adeline."

He also told a very funny story about Senator Saltonstall (Rep., Mass.) at a St. Patrick's day dinner in Boston, claiming to be Irish "by association be-

cause I have an Irish chauffeur."

Mr. Kennedy wrote to me after he got back to Washington. The letter, dated Apr. 23, 1959, is one I will now have framed. It opened "Dear Cy" and went on:

"While sitting at the airport (munching on a hamburger as I recall) the morning you left us, I discovered another side of your nature: I read with delight your article in the Sunday paper on poetry and enjoyed it. It was a pleasure to have your excellent company throughout our visit to Wisconsin and Jackie and I want to express our appreciation."

The article referred to was in the Stage Whispers column.

Mrs. Kennedy had accompanied her husband on part of that tour, but had left before it was over to return to Wash-

ington.

#### Greeted Him Alone

Mr. Kennedy flew here July 31, 1959, in a private plane and I greeted him at the airport. Nobody else was there at the moment because he entered by an unannounced gate.

Always courteous, he remarked that "it was good of you to come out."

Reporters met him again at the airport in January, 1960, when he came to announce he would enter the Wisconsin presidential primary. I recall driving to the airport with Gerald Bruno, now on the Democratic national committee, and Kenneth O'Donnell, an aide to Mr. Kennedy, both of whom worked in the Wisconsin campaign.

During the spring campaign, I covered Mr. Kennedy on many occasions. My wife, Cleo, had met him in April, 1959, when he spoke at the Milwaukee Press club's Gridiron dinner.

In March, 1960, at a reception in the Schroeder hotel, at which Mrs. Kennedy was present, he was greeting people with both hands, and shook mine with his left hand, recognized my wife, down the line and reached out with his right hand to greet her.

At the Los Angeles convention, Mr. Kennedy visited the Alexandria hotel where the

Wisconsin delegation was quartered. We met fleetingly in a corridor. When he was here in October, 1960, campaigning, I did not get to speak to him. His next visit was May 12, 1962, as president of the United States

#### "I Was Thrilled"

There was an enormous crowd to meet him at the airport, including party leaders and public officials. Though I have covered many dignitaries, I admit I thrilled like a schoolboy when Mr. Kennedy spotted me about 20 feet off from his car, strode over and said:

"How are you Cy Rice? My best regards to The Sentinel."

In Oct., 1963, after he had canceled out his Milwaukee visit because of the Cuban crisis, he greeted me as I stood near the presidential jet, at O'Hare field, Chicago, and remarked he had met "my cousin

in Minnesota," meaning my nephew, James I. Rice, political secretary to Gov. Rolvaag of Minnesota.

Mr. Kennedy's last visit to Wisconsin was Sept. 24 when he spoke briefly in Ashland while on a western tour. The writer missed talking to him in Ashland and Duluth.