

Gloria L. Sitrin Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 6/14/1966
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Biographical Note

Gloria L. Sitrin (1929 - 2011) worked as secretary to Theodore C. Sorensen from 1955 to 1963. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s 1960 presidential campaign, Sitrin's role within the Kennedy administration, and Sorensen's contributions as White House Counsel, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Gloria L. Sitrin

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Oral History Interview

with

GLORIA L. SITRIN

June 14, 1966
Alexandria, Virginia

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: First question I want to ask you, though, is simply how did you happen to come to work for John Kennedy or with [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen?

SITRIN: Well, I was working in Washington at the time. I had been here.... Am I talking loud enough?

O'CONNOR: Yes, sure. It'll pick up practically anything.

SITRIN: I had been here just a few months, working for the government and finding the work a little boring. One of the fellows I met had mentioned to me that he heard there was an opening in Senator Kennedy's office. He said, "Why don't you apply for it? You are from Massachusetts." So I thought that you had to have all kinds of political connections, and it just seemed so out of the question I kind of pushed it in the back of my mind. He said,

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"You don't have anything to lose. Why don't you try?" So I decided to. I called one day and spoke to Ted Sorensen. He was about to hire somebody else, but he said if I could cover over that evening, he would hold off. So I did. I went over and he interviewed me. It was a rather quick interview; he didn't even test my stenographic ability because he was more concerned with the

fact that I seemed interested and willing to put in overtime, interested in the work, and anxious to get into something that would be more challenging than just the job that I had at the time. So that's it.

O'CONNOR: I'm surprised he could determine that in, you know, a very short interview.

SITRIN: I am, too. [Laughter] But I think he had had a little trouble with several of his previous secretaries. I think there was no question about their ability, but they seemed to be having some personality problems.

MR. SITRIN: I think they were reluctant to put in the kind of time he was demanding.

SITRIN: Yes, and also there were some personality problems. So I guess he seemed to be satisfied with my attitude. At

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that time, just having gone through this period of difficulty, he was more interested in that, I think, than anything else. And I guess he figured he'd find out soon enough whether I could type and take dictation.

O'CONNOR: One of the issues that was very important just before you came in, really, was the [Joseph R.] McCarthy issue. There's been a lot of controversy over Senator Kennedy's relations with McCarthy. His father was a friend of McCarthy, for example, and at times John Kennedy himself was a friend of McCarthy. I just wondered if you ever heard them talk about it at all, or did Sorensen refer to that at all?

SITRIN: Well, of course, at the time I came in, Senator Kennedy was away convalescing from his back operation, and Ted Sorensen did try to fill me in on a lot of the legislative issues at the time so I could get familiar with what was going on. One of the things he told me about... As a matter of fact, he showed me the mimeographed copy of a speech that was prepared that Kennedy had intended to deliver. It was at the time of the

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censure of McCarthy. I think Sorensen refers to this in his book. But I forget what action the committee took so that at that time he didn't deliver the speech, but he did have it all prepared and ready to go along with censure.

O'CONNOR: That would seem to indicate, it would at least confirm what Ted Sorensen had written.

SITRIN: That's right. I can see that mimeographed, single-spaced speech in my mind — three or four mimeographed sheets.

O'CONNOR: Well, Senator Kennedy was convalescing then when you came to work in the office. Did you see much of him at all? When was the first time that you got to see him?

SITRIN: Well, about a couple weeks after I started working, Ted Sorensen approached me and asked me if I would like to go to Florida, to Palm Beach. He was going down there to work with Kennedy on *Profiles in Courage*, and the secretary that was supposed to go, couldn't go for some reason, and they couldn't spare any of the other girls from the office because they were all involved in their work. Being the newest member of

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the staff, my work wasn't really that cut out, so I was the one that they could spare the most. I was overwhelmed, but delighted with the idea. So that was the first time I met — shall we refer to him as Senator or President?

O'CONNOR: Doesn't make any difference. Senator Kennedy at that time...

SITRIN: Senator Kennedy, at that time...

O'CONNOR: President Kennedy, it doesn't really make any difference, as long as you call him Kennedy. And you actually went down there to work on that book.

SITRIN: On the book with Sorensen. I was rather nervous about meeting Kennedy for the first time. He was very pleasant and put me right at ease. I felt very comfortable. I was surprised, but I did.

O'CONNOR: There's also a controversy about whether or not Senator Kennedy actually wrote that book, or how much of it was Ted Sorensen's contribution. Do you have any comments on that?

SITRIN: I do. There's no doubt that Ted Sorensen contributed quite a bit from the research point of view, but I personally took dictation from Senator Kennedy on the

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book, you know, giving me his original...

O'CONNOR: This is while you were in...

SITRIN: While I was in Florida. That was one of the things that worried me, too, taking dictation from him. I'd never met him and wondered what he'd be

like. But he was very understanding. He sometimes had a tendency of talking quicker than I could take it. He didn't object when I asked to slow down. So many of the first drafts were his original wording.

O'CONNOR: Okay. That's an interesting point. Do you have any other memories at all of what your work was like when you first came to the office? Or anything of that sort before we get on to later years?

SITRIN: Well, at that time, I'm trying to remember. I guess Kennedy came back to the office maybe sometime in June. The work was pretty much involved with the legislative issues, plus getting *Profiles in Courage* to press. Other than that I really can't remember. There was no national issues or national prominence that developed yet.

[MR. DAVE SITRIN IS PRESENT AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE INTERVIEW.]

MR. SITRIN: What about any election preparation at that time?

SITRIN: No, I think that that was a little early. That was in

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June '55.

O'CONNOR: There have been some comments on the heavy work schedule that the people in the Senator's office had to maintain, and some people have complained that Senator Kennedy's office staff was underpaid and overworked. What do you have to say about that?

SITRIN: Well, some people might agree with that. Maybe I would, too, I don't know. But I enjoyed it so much. I knew what I was getting into. I knew it was busy, a lot of overtime. It was very rewarding. I couldn't complain because he was always very nice. I think because of the fact that Ted Sorensen put in so much overtime himself, he was so devoted, as a result I found myself doing a lot of the same thing. I did get raises periodically. So he appreciated the fact that I did put in the extra time. There were some girls in the office.... We had an office downstairs, and these girls handled the so-called "case mail" that was just people with individual problems writing in. They worked pretty much regular hours. So there was always this conflict, you know. The case girls didn't work as

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hard as the legislative girls. But the case girls I don't think got paid as much.

O'CONNOR: We can move on then to 1956, which was a big year for Senator Kennedy because of the attempt at the vice presidency. Were you involved at all in that, or do you have any memories?

SITRIN: I have memories of — I think at that time Ted Sorensen was the one that started pushing it more than anybody else. I remember one of the things he said to me when I first started working. He said... [Baby cries]

O'CONNOR: That's okay, we don't mind having him on tape.

SITRIN: Will he show up?

O'CONNOR: He may, but that's okay.

SITRIN: I think Ted Sorensen early in President Kennedy's career expected big things of him, and he said to me, "Stick with me and we'll go places," or something like that. [Laughter] This is a side comment.

O'CONNOR: You must have had some contact with Evelyn Lincoln when you were...

SITRIN: Oh, yes. We were on another question, but I guess we'll go back. I always had a very nice relationship with her

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but she was rather possessive of Kennedy. Anything that had to be handled for him had to go through her. It was sort of an understanding in the office; all the girls accepted it, and that was just the way it was.

MR. SITRIN: There were times, though, that he would deal directly with another girl. You once asked me, "Should I go back through her?" And I suggested, no, if he started the dealing directly with you, you should go back to him and then tell her.

SITRIN: That's true.

MR. SITRIN: I remember that.

SITRIN: There were times when he came to you directly, and you had no choice but to work with him directly. She made it pretty clear that she was his personal secretary and that's the way she wanted it to be. Everybody had their own job, and they didn't care, you know.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we had started to talk about the year 1956, and some of the things you might have been involved in.

SITRIN: Well, I mentioned that Ted said, "Stick with me and we'll go places." I really think that he thought that Kennedy had a very promising future. And he started writing memoranda and contacting different

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people. He didn't do anything without Kennedy knowing about it, but I think Kennedy kind of thought the whole thing was a big joke at first. But when some people expressed an interest and he started getting some reaction, I think he really kind of encouraged Ted to go along with it.

O'CONNOR: Sorensen, of course, is supposedly the author of the famous memorandum on...

SITRIN: Bailey Memorandum.

O'CONNOR: Bailey Memorandum, yes, do you remember that at all?

SITRIN: I remember typing that.

O'CONNOR: Remember typing that for Ted Sorensen?

SITRIN: Yes, that was always a big joke every time we referred to it as the Bailey Memo.

O'CONNOR: Well, by 1956, Ted Sorensen was, apparently, the top aide to Senator Kennedy.

SITRIN: Well, I don't know. [Timothy J., Jr.] Ted Reardon was the administrative assistant, and I think that title was supposed to be top job in the office. Ted Reardon did handle all the administration and that sort of thing. But as far as ideas and legislative issues and...

MR. SITRIN: Policy.

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SITRIN: Policy, and pushing this vice presidential thing, I think Ted Sorensen really was on top of that.

O'CONNOR: There are comments from various people about rivalries in the office, and the comments often center on Ted Sorensen and Ted Reardon. Do you remember any rivalry at all, or any hard feelings?

SITRIN: I really don't think so because I think Ted Reardon respected Ted Sorensen's abilities in these areas. I think he knew what his

responsibilities were and where he could best serve. I think he was very satisfied to let Ted handle the things he could do so well. I never saw any rivalries between them. I thought they got along very well.

O'CONNOR: You never heard any of the other staff members talk about anything like that?

SITRIN: I can't say that I did.

O'CONNOR: We could move on to.... Unless there's anything else you'd care to comment on about 1956 or the Convention in 1956. Do you have any memories of that?

SITRIN: Well, it's just that the whole thing erupted so quickly. I just don't think that they anticipated what was going to develop. When Ted came back, I remember, he said he

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was scouting around frantically looking for secretarial help. Had he known, he certainly would have taken me. Of course, I was very disappointed. [Laughter] But that was the beginning.

O'CONNOR: Well, when you say the beginning, when did you or the other people in the office begin to think of him as a presidential candidate?

SITRIN: I think it was after the 1956 — of course, it was always denied publicly, but I think that the feeling was there after that.

O'CONNOR: Did Sorensen ever talk to you specifically about that?

SITRIN: I don't know if it was specific, but there was always some comment — or things that were done were sort of geared to the future. It was pretty well understood that he certainly was going to make an attempt for 1960. And his purpose after that was to get himself as well known as possible, to speak for different Congressional candidates, and make a national figure.

O'CONNOR: Well, did your work at all change after 1956?

SITRIN: Well, I think it slowly started to change. There was more politicking. It was slow, I guess the politicking really didn't get into full gear until, say 1958, when he actively

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started campaigning for Congressional candidates. Of course, 1958 was when he was up for re-election.

O'CONNOR: Right, he was involved in a campaign himself.

SITRIN: I guess in the early fall he went on a speaking tour.

MR. SITRIN: You went with him.

SITRIN: Yes. Then after that he came back to Massachusetts and concentrated on the Massachusetts election.

O'CONNOR: Were you up in Massachusetts at all with him?

SITRIN: Yes, in 1958, it worked out very conveniently for me because I was engaged at the time. I was going to get married in the Boston area. So I went up in the fall and worked in the campaign office, and at the same time worked on my wedding plans.

O'CONNOR: [Laughter] Which took precedence?

SITRIN: Well, after 6 o'clock.... I didn't work any overtime. I said the condition on which I would go up was that I worked regular hours. Nine to six — or whatever it was. So they agreed to that. Ted Sorensen was up there at the time.

O'CONNOR: Is that why you were chosen to go up there?

SITRIN: Yes.

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O'CONNOR: Because Ted Sorensen was up there?

SITRIN: Yes, yes. And also because I was kind of anxious to go too. Although it meant leaving my fiance for a couple of months.

O'CONNOR: Well, I suppose the Senator was involved to a certain extent with your wedding preparations as well as his campaign preparations. You mentioned something the last time I talked to you about your attempt to get him to come to your...

SITRIN: Yes, I asked him before I set the date if he would come to the wedding. He said, oh, yes, he'd be delighted. He and I were trying to figure out what was the best date. Dave [Mr. Sitrin] had nothing to do with this. So we

decided November 2, which was two days before the election, that was a Sunday afternoon, because after the election he would be taking off probably. So it was all set; we set the date based on his recommendation. I left the office a few days before to make final plans, preparations, and before I did, I spoke to the person who was handling his schedule to make sure it was on his schedule for that Sunday afternoon. And it was, but he never showed up. Whoever

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handled it — there was a goof up somewhere.

MR. SITRIN: I thought it had something to do with some British labor leader who showed up or something like that.

SITRIN: Well, yes, that was part of it. Also, somehow or other they just eliminated it from his schedule.

MR. SITRIN: It was expendable.

O'CONNOR: Did he ever say anything to you about that?

SITRIN: Yes, he apologized afterwards, and he wrote a letter to my folks apologizing.

MR. SITRIN: Yes, that really impressed your mother.

SITRIN: Almost as much as if he had showed up. I think the guests were disappointed but....

O'CONNOR: I had asked you something about the 1958 Gridiron Dinner, do you have any comments on that?

SITRIN: I remember the day of the dinner. It was a Saturday, and Ted Sorensen was helping Kennedy quite a bit with his speech, but unfortunately he was laid up at home with a backache. He had had back problems, also. The Senator wanted to go out and work on the speech, going over the last minute draft of it, and he asked me if I'd come out there and take down whatever changes

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they made and everything. So I met him at his Georgetown home, and we drove out to Ted's home which was in McLean. So the Senator started reading the speech. They had a tape recorder there, and they played it back. Ted made comments, and the Senator made comments; and they dictated to me. So this was early afternoon, and I had to rush back to the office and type the changes. There really wasn't enough time for me to do the whole thing myself because he wanted each individual joke put up on a card in large print. So I remember calling up Evelyn

Lincoln and getting her down to the office. We finished just in the nick of time, and then I had to go dashing back to the Statler. The President was already on the stage or something. I went dashing up and gave the whole thing to [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy. This was not unusual, by the way, this was done all the time. We always managed to get it done just in the nick of time. It's amazing that more accidents didn't happen. But I think he had enough confidence in his own ability that if something did happen, he could manage to carry it off without the speech. Otherwise, I don't think he'd have been able to stand the tension.

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O'CONNOR: Did you have many contacts with Bobby Kennedy? You said you handed over this particular speech to him. Did you have any contacts with him before then?

SITRIN: Well, he was around quite a bit. At the time, I think he was on that racketeering committee, so he came up quite a bit. He was so busy himself that he didn't involve himself too much without activities at that time. As time went on, he did get more involved.

O'CONNOR: People have remarked about the differences in personality between John and Bob Kennedy. Did you ever notice any particular things?

SITRIN: Yes, I think Bob was a little more outgoing at the time. I think the Senator was a little bit more reserved, and Bob was younger. He always seemed very friendly and very nice.

O'CONNOR: During this period in, let's say, the late 1950s, '58 or '59, when the idea of the presidency was looming larger and larger, the obvious opposition candidate was Richard Nixon. Richard Nixon had an office close to the Senator's office. Did you ever have any contacts with Nixon or with the members of the Nixon staff?

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SITRIN: Not much. Whatever contacts we had were always cordial. I remember when Kennedy came back in 1955 from his convalescence, Nixon sent over a basket of fruit and came over. At that time, of course, things hadn't gotten too far underway. But the staff always had good relationships. It was ironic that our officers were right across the hall like that.

O'CONNOR: Well, Kennedy, eventually, as I understand it, got to like Richard Nixon less and less. I wonder if you ever noticed any or overheard Ted Sorensen talking about any hard feelings between the two.

SITRIN: Well, I think that's probably a natural thing that would evolve when two people are political rivals. I think you start beginning to believe some of this propaganda.

O'CONNOR: You never had any specific comments by Ted Sorensen though?

SITRIN: Well, I'm trying to think. He did make digs here and there, and innuendos.

MR. SITRIN: I remember your reference to digs, but I don't remember specifically what they were. It was obvious to me that Kennedy didn't like this guy.

SITRIN: You know, they just didn't feel that he was the right

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person to run the country.

O'CONNOR: He certainly said that in the 1960 campaign.

SITRIN: I really think he believed quite a bit of it, too. From a personal point of view, though, I think that Nixon could be very charming if he wanted to be.

O'CONNOR: Oh, I'm sure of that. Okay, we can get into the 1960 campaign if you want to, unless you have any further comments before the campaign begins.

MR. SITRIN: I don't know if you are interested in the relationship.... Gloria, you know, on this trip that she mentioned in '58, Mrs. Kennedy was along on the trip.

O'CONNOR: Sure, I'd like to hear about that.

MR. SITRIN: You may be interested in that business. I don't know what specific...

SITRIN: Well, she was only on a short part of it — the early part of the trip. I don't think she was too — she went along mostly because he wanted her to. At that time she wasn't too interested in campaigning.

MR. SITRIN: That's the sort of thing I was thinking you could bring out.

SITRIN: She was pretty good natured about it, she took it as well as she could. He decided after three or four days or so — I really don't remember how long she

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lasted, but, anyway, he decided she could go back.

MR. SITRIN: There's one thing you specifically reported to me, when she asked you to go to a movie. She just couldn't stand one of those dinners again. She wanted to get away from it.

SITRIN: She said, "But I suppose you have to work." And I did. This was in Nebraska, I can remember that.

O'CONNOR: There's a lot to comment on how well, or how poorly she fitted into John Kennedy's political ideas and political plans.

SITRIN: At that time, I'm not sure just how.... As time went on, there was no question she was quite an asset.

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes. What did you do during the 1960 campaign? What was your role, how did it start out, and where did you work?

SITRIN: Well, it started off in the Senate Office Building. At that time most of Ted Sorensen's work was out of the Senate office. We already had this office down in the Esso Building, and that was the political headquarters, supposedly. [Stephen E.] Steve Smith ran that. But Ted was still doing a lot of speech writing. He was involved in a lot of the policy and managing.

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O'CONNOR: You worked right in that office then?

SITRIN: Yes, well, I worked in the Senate Office Building until the fall campaign, and then the question about traveling arose. Ted was going to travel pretty constantly with the Senator because that really was the only way that he could keep up with the speeches. The way he operated and Kennedy operated, everything was always done at the last minute. So the speeches could never be prepared enough in advance to be sent in time to reach the traveling group, so he asked me about the possibility of traveling. I thought it would have been a wonderful opportunity, but I sort of hated to go off and leave my husband. But Dave thought that it really would be a once in a lifetime opportunity, so he was all for it and he encouraged me to do it.

O'CONNOR: So you did get a bit of traveling with them.

SITRIN: So I did travel quite a bit, not constantly, but quite a bit. I really enjoyed it and it was a wonderful experience, but I don't know how I ever did it when I look back at it. Physically it was very hectic. It really was one of the most physically wearing things

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I ever encountered.

O'CONNOR: What sort of schedule did you have? What sort of work did you do when you were on the road when you were travelling with them? Were you working directly for the President, or were you working...

SITRIN: I was working still for Ted Sorensen, mostly for him. There were other people traveling with us, too, other speech writers. And most of the speech drafts went through Ted before they reached the President. We had a couple of other good speech writers, but Ted was the one who really knew what the President wanted and how he'd like to say it. So many times Ted wouldn't get a draft till late at night, after we'd landed in some hotel somewhere, for a speech the next day or next morning. So I wasn't at all surprised when my phone rang at two, three, four o'clock in the morning. It wasn't unusual to see girls walking down the corridors from room to room at that time, going from one man to the other taking dictation.

MR. SITRIN: You were also involved in the debate preparation,

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that was an important thing, I think.

O'CONNOR: What did you have to do for the debate?

SITRIN: The first debate — that was in Chicago, I think — we were up quite a bit of the night preparing papers for the President to go over on issues and positions on different things and...

MR. SITRIN: You said that [Myer] Feldman and Sorensen, you were working with both of them.

SITRIN: Right, Feldman had come to Chicago, bringing all kinds of papers with him. After having been up practically all night — the Senator was staying at the Ambassador East, I think, he wanted Ted to come over the next morning and to bring the secretary. So Ted asked me if I could come. I said I was exhausted, couldn't he get anybody else. Somehow or other nobody else was around or they'd been involved in something else, so we went to the hotel. They gave me a room, and they said I could go to sleep for a couple of hours, and they'd call me when they needed me. So they called me a couple of hours later, and I came up to the Senator's suite, I remember it was

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a very nice sunny fall day; it was in October, I guess. The Senator wanted to dictate some of his own thoughts for the opening comment. So he said to me — this is one thing that stands in my mind very clearly — “Let’s go out on the balcony, and I’ll dictate.” So we went on the balcony, just the two of us out on the balcony, and I said to myself as he was dictating, “This man is probably going to be the next President of the United States, and here I am sitting on the balcony alone with him.” That thought has sort of remained in my mind all this time. So he was dictating at quite a rapid pace, and I was quite tired. I told him, “I didn’t have any sleep all night.” So he said, “That’s alright, just get the idea. You don’t have to get it word for word.” If he just had his thoughts down, he could verbalize very well.

O’CONNOR: Feldman had another office, didn’t he run another office during the campaign?

SITRIN: Yes, he ran the research operation down on...

O’CONNOR: You weren’t involved in that at all?

MR. SITRIN: You worked there for a while.

SITRIN: No, just for a couple of weeks when I stayed back...

MR. SITRIN: You asked for some time

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back home to recuperate.

SITRIN: That’s right, I was exhausted from all that traveling so I worked down there for a couple of weeks. But Feldman was very much involved in this. I think he mentioned to you he thought nothing of getting calls at any hour of the night.

O’CONNOR: Did you ever, again, hear of any conflicts between various groups during the campaign for the Senator’s eye or the Senator’s ear?

SITRIN: I really can’t remember too clearly. I remember at the time there was a little friction going on. But I don’t think it was really very noticeable.

MR. SITRIN: I don’t think you want to talk about it.

SITRIN: No, I really can’t remember. I think if somebody jogged my memory a little I would remember, but I...

MR. SITRIN: What about [Richard N.] Goodwin?

SITRIN: Well, at the time he was actually very valuable because he was about the only one besides Ted that could produce a speech that the Senator would deliver.

MR. SITRIN: I remember something about Ted and Dick not seeing eye to eye on things. I think I remember that there was a little friction developing between them.

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SITRIN: I think there was towards the end there.

O'CONNOR: I'd like to remind you, though, that if there's anything you say here, if you'd like to cut it off, or if you'd like to restrict that specifically for a longer period, or something like that, you're welcome to do it.

SITRIN: Well, I think Dick was rather ambitious — ambitious to push and get his own name in the limelight. I don't know, he might have objected to doing things through Ted Sorensen; he might have wanted to further his own image. Although he is and was a very bright fellow.

MR. SITRIN: That's what I remembered. Ted always had very nice things to say about his abilities, but he didn't like his personal opinions and so forth.

SITRIN: Personality. Yes, that's right.

O'CONNOR: You were going to say something about the Convention.

SITRIN: Well, this is what I'm talking about now, the Convention. Ted found himself involved quite a bit with different states and different groups, and I think a lot of people, having worked with him up to now, came to him for counsel or if they

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had any problems. He was kind of a mediating force, I think, in a lot of the disputes. I can remember one secret meeting which — I was in on it and can't remember.

MR. SITRIN: Was it the Puerto Rican matter, remember that, Jose Benitez.

SITRIN: The Puerto Rican, yes. That's right. Ted somehow or other got involved in that, and he ironed it out. Do you remember the...

O'CONNOR: No, what was the problem?

SITRIN: There were two different Democratic groups from Puerto Rico....

MR. SITRIN: Fighting to be seated.

SITRIN: Right, and one was led by Jose Benitez, he was the out group I think, I really don't remember.

MR. SITRIN: He was much pro-Kennedy, too.

SITRIN: So they didn't want to hurt his feelings by recognizing the other group, so Ted had a secret meeting. I don't remember what the details were, but he did iron it out to Benitez's satisfaction. And there was a lot of this sort of thing going on.

MR. SITRIN: He had you going to a delegate once, I remember. Someone you had met in '58.

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SITRIN: Oh, yes, I remember the woman from Colorado. My one contact.

MR. SITRIN: Other than your official capacity of running the office.

SITRIN: Yes. And, you know, there was always a lot of typing and making good use of the volunteers. We were in the office right next to the Connecticut group — John Bailey's group.

MR. SITRIN: Right across, that's right. They had a TV set. I remember they invited us in to watch one of the debates with Lyndon Johnson — in Bailey's office.

SITRIN: Oh, yes.

O'CONNOR: You were there watching that debate?

MR. SITRIN: Yes.

O'CONNOR: What was it like at the Convention? I mean, do you feel it was organized or disorganized?

SITRIN: Well, I don't know. Maybe it was organized, but I don't have anything to compare it to. It just seemed very disorganized to me, but I guess now when I think about the election, that seemed disorganized to me, and yet everybody talked about the well-organized campaign Kennedy ran. So I guess it was as organized as you could

expect under those circumstances.

O'CONNOR: After the Convention, of course, or after the election, I should say, we could move on to the election itself or afterwards. I don't know that your role was after the Convention, but maybe you'd care to talk about that a little bit.

SITRIN: You mean before the election?

O'CONNOR: Before the election, or if you can't remember anything about that, then in the intervening month or so.

SITRIN: The campaign. Well, we're discussing the campaign.

O'CONNOR: Well, if you can't think of anything specific about that, then we can go on into the White House itself.

SITRIN: No, I guess really.... Can you remember anything special?

MR. SITRIN: The hectic aspect, you know, going through all these states and seeing nothing but airports and hotels.

O'CONNOR: Okay. And you moved into the White House. Do you have any comments on the work you had to do in the White House or in what was it might have differed from work you had done prior to that? Did you move into the White House right away?

SITRIN: Yes, that is...

MR. SITRIN: There's a story about going into the upstairs office and then coming down. That would be interesting, I think.

SITRIN: Well, Ted first got an office upstairs where [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien wound up afterwards. But I think the President felt that he was too far away, so he moved down to the office that we finally kept. I think the thing about the White House is that at first it was hard for me.... Even though Ted was the same kind of person as far as working habits are concerned — he still was a very hard worker, long hours and everything — still, we had so much more help, so many more people to do the things that we.... In the Senate we had to do everything ourselves; go running around doing all the errands and that sort of thing, even mailing our own letters and getting our own stamps and

things like that. But at least you had relief from those tedious tasks in the White House even though you were still pretty much on call, and you never knew what was going to come up.

O'CONNOR: Well, one of the things that must have changed the situation in the White House from what it had been prior was the influx of the Irish mafia, as they

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have been called, Larry O'Brien and [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell. Do you have any comments on how they moved in or how they fitted into the White House?

SITRIN: I really think that they fitted into the role that their reputation set. They really were political figures. Maybe not Larry so much, he was involved in Congressional relations. But Kenny O'Donnell and [John J.] Jack McNally and [Laughter]...

O'CONNOR: Why do you laugh when you mention McNally?

SITRIN: Well he was kind of the...

MR. SITRIN: ... the ax man...

SITRIN: Right.

MR. SITRIN: Like he did all the dirty chores.

SITRIN: I guess somebody had to do that kind of thing.

O'CONNOR: What do you mean? I don't quite understand.

SITRIN: Like denying parking places to people, denying space on the plane for trips, and that sort of thing.

MR. SITRIN: Telling secretaries who worked until midnight that they couldn't get a ride home in a White House car, or that kind of thing.

SITRIN: That's right. At first there was no question that if a girl worked late she could get a ride home

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in a White House car. But after a while he started clamping down on that, and she had to work after ten or eleven before she was allowed a car, or something like that — that sort of thing. I complained bitterly to Ted Sorensen about it because, after all, he's the one

who used to keep us there so late. So we got around it many times by his getting a car, you know, and then after dropping him off, the car would take me home.

O'CONNOR: Were there any additional rivalries in the White House itself that hadn't existed before Kenny O'Donnell, or Larry O'Brien or others came to work so close to the Senator, President then?

SITRIN: Well, I think that people sort of started to fall into their own areas of responsibility. There might have been some rivalry between the Irish mafia and the so-called eggheads or the idea men. But I think each knew where his own importance was and if they resented the other one, it wasn't too obvious certainly. They tried not to make too much of it.

O'CONNOR: How about the relations between Lyndon Johnson's staff, or Lyndon Johnson himself, and the staff that really

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was closer to Kennedy? Do you have any comments on that?

SITRIN: I don't know. I don't really know too much about his staff's relationship. I heard Ted make some comments, occasionally, to the effect that the President wasn't too pleased with some position that Johnson had taken or the attitude he had about something. I think he felt he was in some ways egotistical. I especially remember when he came back from his trip to Asia, I think it was, where he latched onto that camel driver. When he got back to the country, he immediately had to come to report to the President. You know, I think the President got kind of a laugh out of it because I don't think he thought the trip was that important. But that sort of thing.

O'CONNOR: Well, it's been sometimes commented that President Kennedy didn't really use Lyndon Johnson as effectively as he might have, and I wondered if you ever heard Ted Sorensen comment on that. Or whether there was any resentment felt on the part of Ted Sorensen toward Lyndon Johnson, that he wasn't acting as strongly for the Administration as he might have.

SITRIN: Well, I think that any feelings that Ted had about Johnson were pretty much the same as the President. I think Ted felt in some ways he was weak, possibly in foreign policy. I don't think he felt that Johnson, also, came through as well as he could have on the missile crisis.

MR. SITRIN: I remember that specifically because he made a comment that he was signally unimpressed with Johnson's role in that. You reported that. And I think I heard Ted say that, in fact.

O'CONNOR: In connection with the Cuban Missile Crisis he was not particularly impressed?

MR. SITRIN: He was not at all effective, he thought; and he thought his thinking wasn't clear. You know, he just seemed to be panicking.

O'CONNOR: Well you must have been involved to some extent in the Cuban Missile Crisis. I wonder how it looked from your point of view; when did you come to know about it?

SITRIN: Well, I found out about it right at the beginning, as soon as Ted did, because he had several memos he needed typed. He was outlining his thoughts on how it should be handled. The President had suggested

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to those that were involved in it to keep the number of people that knew about it down to a minimum. Ted told me about it, and he said that I was the only girl in the office to know about it and that I was to keep it in strict confidence. I didn't tell Dave a thing about it.

MR. SITRIN: This business I mentioned about Johnson I found out long after this from comments they made.

SITRIN: And as a result I found myself working — I got calls at any hour of the night to come down and type something because he just didn't want to trust anybody else. This was the one time that I really was frightened. The first time. We'd been involved in the Berlin crisis and several other things that I always felt we would come out of all right — and I guess I felt we would come out of this all right, too — but it's just that it was the most frightening experience I had ever seen. So it wasn't till a few days before it became public that we had to have another girl in on it, and then finally the third girl was brought in on it.

O'CONNOR: Another person that was involved to a certain extent in the Cuban Missile Crisis

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was Dean Rusk. There's been a lot of comment on Kennedy's relationship with Dean Rusk. Ted Sorensen and, particularly, Arthur Schlesinger have mentioned it in their books. Do you recall Ted Sorensen's talking about that at all?

SITRIN: Well, I can't remember his commenting about Rusk, specifically, as far as the missile crisis is concerned, but I do recall that he said that the President was not as satisfied with Rusk as he would have liked and he

was thinking of replacing him during his second term. He just felt maybe he could work better with someone else, someone who could exert a little stronger leadership at the State Department.

O'CONNOR: You don't recall any names being mentioned as possible successors?
SITRIN: No, I don't.

O'CONNOR: Okay. Anything else you want to comment on about your experience in the White House? There must be some other memories that stand out.

MR. SITRIN: Some of the crises he might be, you know....

O'CONNOR: You were going to say something about the crisis involving getting James Meredith into Mississippi.

SITRIN: Well, I remember this was at the time Ted was at

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Bethesda Naval Hospital having some tests made — he was having an ulcer problem. The President had called him at Bethesda and told him to get down his thoughts because he was going to make a TV speech on it. This was Sunday night, I guess. So late Saturday night I got a call from Ted to come out to the hospital the next day, to bring my pen, he was going to dictate. This happened to have been the time of the Jewish New Year. After discussing it with Dave, we felt that the nation came first. So I went out and Ted dictated to me. And I think I made several trips back and forth to Bethesda. In the meantime I was transcribing what he dictated, and he was on the phone with the President, and the President was keeping him informed of how things were developing. Ted had planned, I think, on leaving the hospital on Monday; finally he decided that he might just as well come back Sunday night because they were burning up the wires. So I came back with him on Sunday night; we got back to the office; and we called one of the other secretaries to come down. I remember asking her to bring me something to eat.

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I hadn't eaten all day. Ted was involved in getting that speech. I went home afterwards, but I think he stayed into the night, and then all this business went on afterward.

O'CONNOR: You might have been involved also in something in 1962. Ted Sorensen, I believe, went to Massachusetts to help out Teddy Kennedy, who was involved that year in...

SITRIN: I don't know whether he went to Massachusetts, but he was doing a lot of papers and did a lot of.... He prepared some position papers for Teddy, telling him on specific issues how the President — what his thoughts would be on certain issues and how he felt Teddy should handle himself and that sort of thing.

O'CONNOR: Do you recall Ted Sorensen saying anything at all about whether he really thought Ted Kennedy should run for the office in Massachusetts?

SITRIN: I don't think the President was too anxious for Ted to run, but he was pretty determined to do it. So if he made up his mind to do it, I guess they decided they might as well support him and help him as much as they could without making it too obvious. Ted was

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always good in knowing what the issues were and laying them out clearly. He just knew how to condense things, and he had really a great way of doing that.

O'CONNOR: Okay. Unless you can think of any other issues or any other incidents that you might talk about while you were in the White House, we can shut this off.

SITRIN: I can't think of anything.

MR. SITRIN: Shut it off.

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