

Alvin A. Spivak Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 7/26/2003
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Biographical Note

Alvin A. Spivak (born 1927) served as White House Correspondent for United Press International from 1960 to 1967 and as Director of Public Affairs for the Democratic National Committee from 1968 to 1970. This interview focuses on Spivak's relationship with John F. Kennedy (JFK), Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ)'s role in the White House, and Spivak's covering of events during the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

ALVIN A. SPIVAK

July 26, 2003

Vero Beach, Florida

by Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: I'm Vicki Daitch, and I'm speaking with Al Spivak, who covered Capitol Hill even before you started covering the White House, right?

SPIVAK: Yes, I did.

DAITCH: We're in Vero Beach, Florida, and today is the 26th of July, 2003. Well, let's go back. First thing we'll do is talk about your covering Capitol Hill. Did you meet Kennedy during that period?

SPIVAK: Yes, I did. But we weren't.... We not only weren't close, we didn't know each other well at all. His main interest, I believe, was in foreign policy. As I recall, he was chairman of the Africa Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee. He'd be busy today if he were alive. And my being the junior man on the Senate staff.... At that time I was with the old International News Service, INS, which later merged with UP, and that's how it became UPI; it was the I of UPI.

I was covering investigations in the Senate, mostly of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of what was then the Government Operations Committee. Now it's called something else. Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] became a counsel of that. So I got to

know Bob Kennedy very well; we were reasonably good friends. I don't recall whether John Kennedy was a member of that committee or not. I know that during the Labor Rackets Hearings, when Bob Kennedy was the chief counsel, John Kennedy sat on those hearings. But I can't remember whether that was the Labor Committee that held those or the Investigations Subcommittee. I'm just not sure. I think it was still the same committee, and I think John Kennedy was a member of that. So we crossed paths a little bit, but we never got to know each other. It was Bob Kennedy I knew during that period.

DAITCH: Tell me a little bit about what Bob Kennedy was like then. Because it's certainly relevant to the Library, and we want to know about him as well.

SPIVAK: Well, very affable, very bright. First time I met him was when he first came to work for Joe McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] as an assistant counsel. The chief counsel was a fellow named Fripp Flanagan [Francis D. "Fripp" Flanagan]; it was Francis Flanagan, his nickname was Fripp, F-R-I-P. And Fripp sort of broke him in as an investigator, investigative counsel. And I guess it was our Boston newspaper client. Is the *Boston American* still in existence? I don't even know.

DAITCH: Not that I know of.

SPIVAK: Well, it was a tabloid at that time. They asked for a little personality feature about Bob Kennedy. So I interviewed him for one and got to know him that way. I remember about a week after the thing appeared, I ran into him at a little rinky-dink cafeteria in the basement of the Senate Office Building. At that time there was only one Senate Office Building. Now there are three. It shows you how things expand in Washington. And he was with his wife, Ethel, [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]. That's the first time I met her. They were delighted with the article.

DAITCH: Oh, good!

SPIVAK: So that sort of led to a little bit of a friendship. So over the course of time.... It wasn't a personal friendship; it was a business friendship. But it led to being invited to parties at Hickory Hill. One time I got on the boat. It was the Skakel Family boat; went out on the Potomac with them. I remember that vividly. Various other encounters.

DAITCH: Wasn't it pretty exclusive to go to Hickory Hill? I had heard that not just everybody went.

SPIVAK: Not everybody went, but they were very good about inviting the press to a lot of occasions. I remember there was one--I don't know what the occasion was, but all the members of the committee were there: Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan], this was probably during the labor rackets days; Senator Ervin [Samuel James

Ervin, Jr.]; and, oh, I can't remember all of them. His brother John Kennedy and their people. Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] showed up; he was still going to law school at the University of Virginia. Eunice Kennedy [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] was there, and she.... They had this little band playing. They broke out into a Cha-cha-cha, which was all the rage at that time, and Eunice came over to me and said, "Would you dance [pronounced "dahns"] with me?" And I said, "Well, I don't do the Cha-cha-cha." And Eunice said, "You cahn't dahns the Cha-cha-cha?" It was a moment I'll never forget. [Laughter]

DAITCH: That's great!

SPIVAK: But there were quite a few occasions there, sort of picnic-type things, parties at the house. When I say quite a few, now, I guess it might have been somewhere between a half dozen and a dozen. But for me, as someone who didn't live in a place like Hickory Hill, that was very, very significant.

DAITCH: Yes, well, I would think it would be pretty thrilling in some ways.

SPIVAK: It was, yes.

DAITCH: You used the word "affable" to describe him, and I thought, I'm not sure I've ever heard anybody describe Bob Kennedy during that period as affable.

SPIVAK: Well, he was affable to me. He was affable to reporters, by and large. We liked him, he liked them. Slowly, as he grew older, he learned how to deal with reporters very well. And, you know, we were covering every day. When he left that committee, there was a big dispute between Democrats and Senate Republicans on the thing. It was by then the McCarthy Committee.

When I started covering them, the Senate was controlled by the Democrats. Then in January of '53 the Republicans took over, and Joe McCarthy became chairman, and that's when all hell broke loose. By '54 you had the Army-McCarthy hearings. Even though Bob had left for a period of time, he came back as the Democratic counsel for the committee. He didn't start that way. He started working for Joe McCarthy. He came back working, in a sense, against Joe McCarthy. But it was more against Roy Cohn [Roy M. Cohn], who was the chief counsel. He despised Roy Cohn. He made no secret of it. One time they almost came to fisticuffs. Almost when they had an argument or something right after a hearing, and he said to Cohn, "Would you like to step outside?" Cohn ignored the question.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: But there was very bad blood between them. Then later, during the labor rackets hearings, when he was *the* chief counsel, the Democrats came back in control of the Senate and of the committee. McClellan was the chairman. So we got to know him very well that way. As I say, when I use the word "affable," that's the way

reporters who covered him found him. Or at least speaking for myself, that's the way it was. I don't remember hearing any other feelings from reporters.

DAITCH: That's interesting. I had always heard that he was just so tough, and he could be volatile.

SPIVAK: Oh, he was tough. Oh, there was no question about that. But he wasn't tough with us. He was very nice to us. Yes, we were his bread and butter in a sense. We were the ones who publicized the committee's doings, and he came out in a very good light. Usually. There were some times when that toughness of him really grated against me. I thought that the way he handled the labor rackets hearings was rather severe. But I wasn't a victim. That was Jimmy Hoffa [James R. "Jimmy" Hoffa] and Dave Beck [David Beck] who preceded Hoffa as head of the Teamsters. They were the victims. So while I didn't exactly like that in my own mind, I still liked him personally. And I loved Ethel.

DAITCH: When he was working on this committee, you covered that pretty extensively and you watched?

SPIVAK: I covered the McCarthy Committee extensively and the Army-McCarthy hearings and the McCarthy censure hearings very closely. Labor rackets, I started covering very closely. But by that time I was in and out of it, and I was sort of covering sidelights and highlights. But I would still say I covered it extensively, yes.

DAITCH: Because I was wondering if you.... I'm getting the feeling that you didn't think that maybe that Hoffa and some of the other people were handled that fairly.

SPIVAK: I think that the.... I don't have a question in my mind that they deserved whatever they got. However, I'm pretty much of a stickler for process. And when someone invokes the Fifth Amendment and refuses to testify in the words the lawyers give him, "because it may tend to incriminate me," those are the words they used to use, I guess they still do, and if it happens once, it's done. Joe McCarthy used to say, "Okay, you're a Fifth Amendment Communist." That was his phrase.

But the technique that Bob used was to keep asking them questions that he knew they wouldn't answer, so that he would set up these artificial records of numbers of times that they refused to answer. So that we would say, "The man refused to answer 52 times," or 103 times, whatever it was. Well, the fact is that was just harassment in my mind.

DAITCH: Yes. And it sounds like it was setting up something to look a certain way publicly.

SPIVAK: Oh, there's no question about that. Now these were not--I don't think these were televised hearings. Army-McCarthy certainly was. Well, he didn't ask

questions in Army–McCarthy. He just worked for the Democratic members. Joe Welch [Joseph Nye Welch], the famous Joe Welch was the guy who did the questioning on behalf of the Army. And on behalf of the committee it was a fellow named Ray Jenkins [Ray Howard Jenkins]. And the Democratic members of the committee asked questions. But during the labor rackets committee, when he was the chief counsel, he was the questioner. But as I say, still and all, the press got along with him very well and vice versa.

DAITCH: Well, let's go into then John Kennedy. You were covering maybe a little bit of what he was doing in the House and the Senate?

SPIVAK: Very little, very little. When I got to cover John Kennedy closely, it was 1960, and that was after INS didn't exist anymore. We went out of business in '58, and I was then with UPI, and was really working on general assignment or inside on the news desk. During the 1960 Democratic Convention, I wasn't covering John Kennedy as a candidate; I was covering Symington [W. Stuart Symington] of all people.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

SPIVAK: I guess, again, they just figured they could trust me with him. He didn't stand a chance. But when the convention was over, the day after it was over, whatever day it was that he flew back to Hyannis Port, I was assigned to cover him full time.

DAITCH: Oh, good.

SPIVAK: With Merriman Smith, who was also with UPI. That became full time for that campaign, for the so-called *interregnum* between his election and inauguration, and then through his years in the White House, too few of them.

DAITCH: Did you cover the 1956 convention when he was running for vice president?

SPIVAK: No. I was in San Francisco setting up our coverage for the Republican Convention, but I followed it very closely on TV. Because.... Well, because it was interesting to follow. But in '56 Kefauver [C. Estes Kefauver], of course, beat him for the vice presidential nomination. I covered the Kefauver vice presidential campaign.

DAITCH: Oh, you did.

SPIVAK: Which was possibly the most hilarious campaign in political history. And the biggest waste of time and of political funds. But I covered that. I covered a couple of weeks of Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. But I did not cover that episode at the Democratic convention.

DAITCH: What you saw of Kennedy at that time, did you find him to be an impressive candidate? Or could you imagine that he was thinking about running for president?

SPIVAK: The answer is no, to be very candid about it. He didn't seem to me to have set a very impressive record in the Senate. It's not a matter of whether I knew him or didn't know him. But I just didn't.... Obviously I observed what went on in the Senate, being a reporter on the Senate staff of our wire service. And I wasn't struck by him as a senator. I didn't have anything against him; I wasn't struck against him. But he just seemed to me another senator. During that time Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] was, of course, the most impressive among the Democratic senators. When the '60 convention rolled around, certainly in the late-night bar conversation at the National Press Club, when we talked among ourselves after suitable libation, I probably was among those who favored Johnson, among reporters. We're neutral. But there's a big ha ha after the neutral--in the sense that you can be very neutral in your coverage, but you still have your own impressions of people.

DAITCH: Of course.

SPIVAK: And we were just talking about among Democrats. Among Republicans there was no question. Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] was the guy who was going to be the nominee in '56. And then in '60 there was no question that Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] was going to be the nominee. So that didn't come up in our conversations really. But as far as who do you think is going to get the nomination, those of us who had covered the Senate thought, well, it must be Johnson because he's such a shrewd, powerful guy. Well, of course he didn't have the delegate votes.

DAITCH: Other than that. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: And I didn't really learn about delegate votes until I became part of a political campaign. That was later. That was eight years later.

DAITCH: I just find it interesting. Sometimes I talk to people, and I ask them, you know, could you see that Kennedy was getting ready to make a run for the presidency, and what did you think of him as a candidate? I'm surprised how many people.... Once in a while I get people who say that they didn't think that much of him. But a lot of people, and I wonder if it's in retrospect, that they say, oh, yes, we could see that he was going to run, and we thought he might win.

SPIVAK: Well, my retrospect is very vivid that I don't know whether he was going to run, and I didn't care whether he was going to run. I knew that Johnson was very.... I don't know if he was open about it at that time. But we certainly had a

feeling that he was running, not going to run, even though he had had a heart attack. He seemed to be well. Symington was very open about running, but I wasn't very impressed with him. And I forget who else was in the running at that time. Of course, there was an effort to.... Oh, Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], of course, yes. And I did not cover the primaries, unfortunately. I wish I had.

DAITCH: Yes, that would have been interesting.

SPIVAK: Yes. I probably would have been very impressed with Kennedy if I had. Reporters who covered the primaries became very impressed with him leading into the convention. I didn't, so that was a little part of it. But, of course, there was a big move to draft Adlai Stevenson in '60. It wasn't a big move because it didn't get anywhere.

DAITCH: Right, but it was an important part of that.

SPIVAK: But it existed.

DAITCH: Yes. Absolutely. After he got the nomination and you sort of got to see him in action as a candidate....

SPIVAK: Oh, yes, there was a magical conversion then.

DAITCH: Really?

SPIVAK: Yes. Because, you know, as we saw him in action, as we heard him speak, as we saw how he conducted himself as a candidate, I would say the Press Corps, maybe not to a man or to a woman, but very largely, maybe not universally but very largely, came to be very, very highly impressed with him and feel very favorably about him. There was a lot of antagonism among various press people about Nixon. I didn't share that because I had gotten to know him as a senator because he was very active on that McCarthy Committee when I covered it. He had been very nice to me at that time. Nothing like having someone be nice to you to form your impression. And so I didn't dislike him. But I didn't particularly care for him as a candidate in 1960. I only covered him for a couple of weeks. But I encountered him as vice president, after he became vice president. I wasn't impressed by him during that time, but I didn't have any feeling of antagonism toward him.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: But I did, without question.... At that time I didn't vote, which I'm ashamed to say now. But there was a stupid feeling among a lot of reporters, oh, I'm not going to vote. I'm neutral.

DAITCH: Right, right. I have to be objective, and I can't....

SPIVAK: That's ridiculous, looking back on it.

DAITCH: Of course, you're still a citizen.

SPIVAK: Looking back at it, it's ridiculous. And actually, at the--when was it? I wanted to vote I guess it was '64, but I couldn't break away to do it. So I didn't really cast a vote for a president until '68 when I was out of the news business. But I say that with shame.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. I could see why reporters would feel that way, though.

SPIVAK: But if I had voted in '60, I definitely would have voted for Kennedy. There was never a question in my mind.

DAITCH: When you say you weren't that impressed with Nixon as a candidate, do you mean that you weren't impressed with his stands on the issues, or...?

SPIVAK: That's number one.

DAITCH: Number one. Were you not impressed with his campaign strategy or his ability to connect with voters or other people in his communications? What else were you not...?

SPIVAK: All of the above.

DAITCH: Really?

SPIVAK: Really. All of the above. Which surprised me because I didn't go into that with any antagonism. But it developed, and it didn't take long to develop. But it really.... Part of it was the positive feeling that I had about Kennedy.

DAITCH: But that's interesting because you didn't start out with that. You know, you probably had more of a relationship with Nixon in terms of just a friendly, you know, you knew him better maybe from what you're telling me.

SPIVAK: Yes, yes. But I didn't know him politically better. But I guess this is just person to person. Then I got to know John Kennedy person to person during the '60 campaign, and found him to be a very delightful individual. But again, what impressed me was his stands on the issues and his manner of expressing that stand. I don't have to tell you or anybody else just how wonderful that was.

DAITCH: Yes. It's really amazing, just looking back.... I'm sorry that I was not old enough to have sort of seen him in person. My dad saw him from a distance one time when he was campaigning in West Virginia. But, you know, looking at the--you're talking old films, some of it black and white, but the charisma is just incredible. You can just--I mean you can see how attractive. I don't mean just physically. But, you know, just the humor, articulate grasp of the issues.

SPIVAK: Well, the physical attraction certainly turned the women on. There's no question about that. I don't think it particularly turned the men on. So the attraction to me was not physical. The attraction to me was totally political.

When I say political, you can use other words: ideological, philosophical, any word you want to use. And I realize that as a reporter I wasn't supposed to.... Let me amend that. As a reporter I can think anything I want to think. Now, my coverage did not reflect that. My coverage was right down the middle. At least I feel that it was, and no one ever told me it wasn't. So it must have been.

DAITCH: That must be incredibly difficult if you feel strongly about the issues.

SPIVAK: It's just the facts, ma'am. You just say what happened or what someone said or how he said it, to the extent without expressing an opinion of whether it's good or bad, when I say how he said it in the terms of, was his voice hoarse? Was he laughing? How did the audience greet him? How large were the crowds. And on and on and on. And remember, Nixon didn't campaign to anywhere near the extent that John Kennedy did.

DAITCH: Why do you think he didn't?

SPIVAK: I think.... Well, I can only think, I don't know.

DAITCH: We're speculating here.

SPIVAK: I can speculate that he felt he didn't have to. Here he was a sitting vice president, and here was a relatively unknown senator, young senator, running against him. And Nixon, I'm sure, felt that he had the issues down cold. And then, you know, you come to that first televised debate. I watched it on television. I had a couple of days off. I was visiting my parents in Philadelphia, and I remember watching it with them on the TV screen, and thinking to myself, My God, Nixon must be sick.

DAITCH: Well, he was, in fact.

SPIVAK: Yes. As a matter of fact, I wound up having the same doctor he had had at Walter Reed for whatever that thing is you have--I can't remember what it was. But anyway, that's irrelevant. He just looked so bad. But then I thought he

sounded very bad, too. I don't mean physically sounded bad. I thought that he didn't come through well from the debating standpoint. Now, others tell me.... Not tell me. Strike that. Others have said, and with good reason, that if you only heard it on the radio or if you didn't watch it on the screen, that you felt that if you have winners or losers in one of those things, and you don't, that Nixon came through better than Kennedy did. I didn't feel that way.

DAITCH: Hmm. If you were just listening to it. Now I've heard that Nixon, though, was a pretty masterful debater.

SPIVAK: Oh, he was very good, yes. He was quite good.

DAITCH: And, again, this thing about him being a little over-confident, someone else had told me, I forget who tells me what, but we talked about this, that.... And in fact it was people who were involved in the debate were telling me, you know, setting it up and all that, were telling me that they tried to get him to prepare more. Because it is a televised debate. It's a new thing. It may take some preparation. And he just didn't really think he needed to, I guess.

SPIVAK: Well, and also remember that at that point John Kennedy had more going against him than Nixon had, starting with his Catholicism, and his youth, and you could say lack of experience when you're comparing a senator versus a vice president. So he was like Avis. He had to try harder, and then he became number one.

DAITCH: Well, there's something to be said for that level of energy and commitment and discipline, I suppose.

SPIVAK: Well, there's no question that they worked hard on it because I was in the press pool flying.... I mean I was usually on the press pool because if I was covering him, usually it was because Merriman wasn't or.... Because I didn't cover him every day of the campaign. But I covered him most of that campaign. And I'd say the amount of time I covered him probably, oh, two thirds of the time I was in the press pool that flew aboard the *Caroline* with him. And you could see how the staff was interacting with him. The staff was interacting with us, too, as reporters, asking our opinions on things.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman], well, see he's still alive. I looked up names on the Web today of people who had given oral histories, and I see he's up there in years now. But Mike was one, and Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], of course. Well, Mike worked for Ted. I forget who the others were. Doris Kearns' husband.... Oh, Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin].

DAITCH: Oh, right, right.

SPIVAK: He'd like that, you know, that I identified him by her.

DAITCH: So those guys actually asked your opinions about Kennedy?

SPIVAK: Occasionally. Mmmm hmmm.

DAITCH: But more just interaction like?

SPIVAK: It was just interaction. You're on an airplane together, you're flying for an hour or two or whatever, and you're chatting. And so something will come up, and they'll say, "Well, what do you think of this?"

DAITCH: Were you ever with Nixon? Was there that same level of give and take?

SPIVAK: Oh, the opposite.

DAITCH: Really?

SPIVAK: The opposite. His plane.... Well, flying with Kennedy was on a smaller plane. It was a little Convair, I forget the number of it, 640 or something. The reason I know is I later went to work for the company that had made the Convair.

DAITCH: You're kidding!

SPIVAK: General Dynamics. Never dreaming that I would wind up there. That was a small airplane, and so we got together. Nixon was flying on a commercial airliner, a chartered commercial airliner, and they put the press pool in a little area right next to the garbage bins in the galley. And don't think that didn't create some resentment. As I say, I was only on there for two weeks. But the funniest thing that ever happened on that airplane, while I was not there, but my partner at UPI, Merriman Smith, was aboard, and he had an excruciating sense of humor. I don't know what other adjective to use. But they were seated back there. The ventilation was bad, everything was bad. So at one stop they went out and bought a little toy canary, and they hung the canary up there, like the coal miners had, to tell whether there was enough air in the shaft. Well, that drove the Nixon staff crazy.

DAITCH: That's cute. Did they hang it upside down?

SPIVAK: But that was the mood that prevailed on that airplane.

DAITCH: Wow! That's different.

SPIVAK: As far as the press was concerned. The press aboard Kennedy's plane was treated as part of the group.

DAITCH: That's interesting. And I wonder how much that helped the Kennedy campaign in terms of keeping in touch with what the people were.... I mean you guys were people just like anybody else.

SPIVAK: Well, not too many people thought that. Kennedy himself and his staff had a very, very pleasant relationship with the press. I don't know to what extent they meant it, but the press meant it. Well, we didn't see Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]. She was pregnant at that time. So she couldn't take part anyway. But if she had, she probably would have been a bit aloof. I imagine because she just was aloof. I don't say that out of personal knowledge, but you talk to.... I won't get into that.... Off the record, you talked to Helen Thomas [Helen A. Thomas], and I'm sure she told you that.

But on the Nixon plane Mrs. Nixon, Pat Nixon [Thelma Catherine "Pat" Ryan Nixon], was very nice, very nice. Some of the staff were difficult to deal with. Some were fine to deal with. Herb Klein [Herbert G. Klein], his press secretary, was well liked by the press. But we didn't get to know many others of the staff.

DAITCH: Well, I think it would be hard to write.... And again, this is from the point of view of trying to be objective, and you write down what you see and what you hear. And it would be more difficult to bring to life Nixon and his staff and his associates and his advisors in a way that is, you know, warm or colorful or believable.

SPIVAK: Well, he was very stiff. I don't say that in a critical way. I just feel that that's the way he was. I'm sure he was very warm to his daughters and to Pat. But with us he was--it was an arm's-length relationship even though in the Senate, when he was in the Senate, we had a very nice relationship. I don't know if it's because he had been vice president all those years, eight years, or whether it's just that he was rather tense about the election. I don't know. I can't give a reason. But there was a stiffness there. Also, I think that they felt the press was against them because the coverage was going Kennedy's way. The coverage was definitely going Kennedy's way.

I was on the Nixon plane during the two weeks before the second debate. The press people who were chosen for those panels on the debates, since they were handled by the networks inevitably network people were on the panels. But they also would have--in the case of the second debate, which was held in Washington at the NBC studios, there were two network people, Ed Morgan [Edward P. Morgan] of ABC, and I forget the man's name [Paul Niven] at CBS; and two print press people, who were chosen by lot. It's the only lottery I ever won. So I was one of the two. And a fellow named Hal Levy [Harold R. Levy] was the other. He was then with *Newsday*.

As we were getting off the Nixon plane in Philadelphia, I just happened to be standing close to the door as Nixon was going to get off. Or maybe we got off first. I forget how it was. But he looked at--and, of course, after that hassle, after the first debate--he

looked at me and said, “Well, have you arranged to have a makeup man take care of you?” And that’s the only “joke” I can remember him telling really. Or not joke, but the only attempt at humor that I can recall. I can recall several very disastrous attempts at humor when he was trying to be funny, and it didn’t work. I don’t think I’ll get into those.

DAITCH: Well, you almost feel sorry for him compared to somebody like a Kennedy who was pretty--who had a wonderful, quick sense of humor.

SPIVAK: Oh, yes. There was none of that, none of that.

DAITCH: So tell me about the debate. That must have been just fun. Or at least interesting.

SPIVAK: It was both. I can’t say it was fun. I was scared to death; 60 million people were going to be watching, and I didn’t have any experience along that line. And I remember during part of the time I was still on the *Caroline* covering; I guess we were on the *Caroline* most of the time. I don’t remember being on an airliner, a chartered airliner. I just remember the little plane. I remember Mike Feldman had a bunch of papers. He was sitting opposite me at this little table that we had in the airplane. And he had a whole bunch of papers open in front of me upside down, probably knowing that a print reporter can read upside down since he’s been involved in a composing room in a newspaper where they set type upside down. I had the impression he was trying to give me some ideas, and I was ignoring him.

But when I got to Washington for the debate, my boss at UPI gave me a list of about 20 questions he wanted me to ask. And I told him, first of all, the format didn’t permit 20 questions. And second of all, I didn’t like his questions. I didn’t tell him that. I just didn’t use them. I got three questions in. The first question was a rather stupid one about whether he and Nixon would go to a summit meeting. Because at that time something had happened that day to cause me to ask that question. They both had the same answer: not without preparation.

The second question I thought was pretty good in the sense that when Nixon had been in the South, he had never mentioned civil rights or whatever, nor had Kennedy to any great extent, whatever. I forget my lead-in to the question. But it was basically, where are you on civil rights? Civil rights then was a very, very hot issue.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

SPIVAK: Today you wouldn’t bother with a civil rights question. But then when you covered a political convention, at least a wire service man covering it, the big story was, what will the civil rights plank be like? So it was a major issue. And they both handled it reasonably well; I thought Kennedy better. And the third question, I was all set to ask a certain question, had it all written out in front of me. But there had been some back and forth between them on another issue. I can’t remember the details. It was my turn to

ask one of Kennedy. Of course you would rotate. They would call on us in sequence, and you would rotate who you were asking the question to. So I had started with Kennedy, went to Nixon, now it was my turn with Kennedy. And there in front of God, man, and 60 million people, and my mother at home, I ad libbed the question.

DAITCH: Wow! That's bold!

SPIVAK: Well, I should have gotten the Congressional Medal for that.

DAITCH: Yes.

SPIVAK: And it was something to the effect of, "Senator, all these proposals you're making, how can we do it without breaking the budget?" It was not a friendly question. It was asked in a friendly way, but it was not a friendly question. The answer was magnificent. And then Nixon came along and gave an adequate answer, but it didn't meet the standards, I didn't think. So I thought in that debate Kennedy prevailed again. But I don't know. Maybe I was biased.

DAITCH: I don't know, you were there.

SPIVAK: Well, being there doesn't help necessarily. You're rather wrapped up in what you're going to be doing, and how do they look, how do they react? And Nixon was very careful to look good in that second debate.

DAITCH: I'll bet.

SPIVAK: And in the next two.

DAITCH: Did he have makeup on?

SPIVAK: Oh, yes. He certainly did.

DAITCH: I'll bet he did.

SPIVAK: Even we did.

DAITCH: Well, you know, especially in that era it was important.

SPIVAK: I guess today it isn't that important.

DAITCH: I've heard that, yes. But, you know, then I think it was a bigger thing.

SPIVAK: It certainly was then.

DAITCH: Well, that's pretty exciting. I think that's incredibly courageous to just ad lib like that.

SPIVAK: So do I. So do I.

DAITCH: It's wonderful. But I mean that would be the kind of thing that you would probably do in another situation which is more relaxed, like a press conference or something. If he had answered a previous question in a certain way and it struck your mind, you wouldn't have thought twice about ad libbing like that.

SPIVAK: Oh, yes. Yes, you'd follow up on something someone else has asked. I didn't do it quite so much. Because usually if I asked a question, because of your position as the wire service, senior wire service, reporter, which I was not, but if I was at the Kennedy press conference, I was there in the place of Merriman, who was the senior wire service reporter, and we always had either the first or second question. And I think even today that's the case with the presidential press conferences, of which there are none.

DAITCH: Such as they are, yes.

SPIVAK: At least of which there seldom are any now. Then it was almost every week.

DAITCH: Yes, and those were wonderful fun to watch. Did you, while you were preparing for the debate, did you like discuss what questions you were going to ask of your colleagues, with Merriman Smith, for example, or people like that?

SPIVAK: No, no.

DAITCH: No. You just did your own thing?

SPIVAK: Even getting a haircut.

DAITCH: About getting a new suit and a haircut.

SPIVAK: Merriman didn't approach me. The only one who approached me was my boss, our bureau manager. And I didn't use his questions, and I never heard anything about it. He didn't seem to care.

DAITCH: Well, he had terrible advice, it sounds like. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: The only time I was forced to use something that he told me to ask was at a press conference. One of our clients, who owned some newspapers and paper

mills somewhere in the country, I don't know, but they were going to strike out there, and I was required to ask a question about where Kennedy stood on the strike. And, of course, I thought, how can I not do this and keep my job? So I figured what Kennedy would say was, I don't know anything about it.

Well, at that time you would stand up, be recognized, and sit down when he started answering. So I stood up. I didn't have the first question then. Merriman was there, and I was seated several rows back. So I stood up, and I asked this stupid question, and Kennedy started cross-examining me. I would sit down.... This happened about three or four times. I had to keep getting up, bobbing up and down, as he would ask me another question along the way. And then doggone if he didn't come up with the answer. He knew exactly what I was talking about. And I had not alerted them in advance. And this was a remote, nondescript issue, I thought. Or maybe he just figured, well, it involves a strike, and here's the way I respond to a question about a strike. But he answered it very well. Not to the liking of our client, I'm sure. I only asked one planted question.

DAITCH: What do you mean "planted"?

SPIVAK: Literally planted. There's sort of a code of honor among reporters that you don't ask a planted question, a question that the party that's being interviewed asks you to ask.

DAITCH: Oh, I see.

SPIVAK: That you ask your own questions. As I say, it's a code of honor. It's breached many times. Or it's honored in the breach many times. But this was in 1961, and it was my turn to ask the first question. And Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher], who was the deputy press secretary, came over to me and said, "Al, if you ask a question about Cuba, the president will answer it." And I said, "What kind of question?" And he said, "That's up to you."

DAITCH: Wow!

SPIVAK: Well, exactly: wow! I thought to myself, well, the heck with him. I'm not going to ask a question because he asks me to ask it. And then I thought to myself, well, if I'm going to ask something that's going to get a good answer--and when I say a "good answer" I mean an important answer--figure out a way to ask it. I looked it up on the Library website today, and I found the question and the answer.

DAITCH: Really! That's great.

SPIVAK: This was just before the Bay of Pigs. Now, we didn't know there was going to be a Bay of Pigs. We just knew there was a lot of activity, a lot of rumors swirling around. So I asked something to the effect of, "If there's an anti-Castro

[Fidel Castro] revolt in Cuba, what position will you take?" And some la-de-da some more.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

SPIVAK: I guess la-de-da was my last word. Well, anyway, I asked that about Cuba.

DAITCH: So what exactly...? How did you frame the question?

SPIVAK: Well, as I said, I looked it up, and the question was: "Mr. President, has a decision been reached on how far this country would be willing to go in helping an anti-Castro uprising or invasion..." And that was prescient of me. I didn't know anything about an invasion. As I say, I was just fumbling and stumbling. I didn't know what I was doing. "...in Cuba? And what can you say with respect to recent developments as far as the anti-Castro movements in Cuba are concerned?" I didn't know about any movements. Apparently there weren't any.

But he answered, and as I say, this was the answer he wanted to give. That was the news of the day. "Well, first I want to say that there will not under any conditions be an intervention in Cuba by United States Armed Forces. And this government will do everything it possibly can, and I think it can meet its responsibilities, to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba." Then the answer went on, and he said more after that.

But as time went on after the Bay of Pigs, of course, he was accused of being the cause of its failure by not sending American air power, by not having the American Navy help, etc., etc. But he wanted to be on record before something happened, and he knew that it was happening. I didn't, I assure you. But he wanted to be on record saying we wouldn't be sending any of our forces to help out. So, okay, that's my one and only planted question, and I'm glad I did it.

DAITCH: Sure. Well, that's legitimate. I mean it was a legitimate question, and it was framed in the way that you wanted to frame it.

SPIVAK: Oh, it was definitely a legitimate question. But I probably wouldn't have asked it if I hadn't had that little suggestion.

DAITCH: Do you think somebody would have, or do you think people were just steering clear of the subject?

SPIVAK: I have no idea. No one else asked about Cuba that day. So I have no idea. Because frequently you'll get a follow-up from someone. You'll notice if you

watch, and I'm sure you do, presidential press conferences, you don't just get one question on a major issue. You get a whole series of them. One reason I'm glad I don't cover the White House anymore, this goes back many years I've been glad I don't cover the White House anymore, is the way the reporters just keep turning it around, asking it front ways, back ways, side ways, inside out, upside down. Once you've asked it and it's been answered, that would seem to take care of it.

DAITCH: Right. Let's ask something else that might be important.

SPIVAK: Yes.

DAITCH: I want to back up for a minute and ask you about Johnson as a running mate. You obviously knew Johnson.

SPIVAK: Yes, I knew him in the Senate.

DAITCH: Were you surprised that Johnson agreed to run with Kennedy?

SPIVAK: Shocked.

DAITCH: Were you?

SPIVAK: Yes, I was very surprised. Amazed.

DAITCH: Why?

SPIVAK: I didn't think he could be satisfied being No. 2 to anybody. He was the Senate majority leader. He had been Senate minority leader, but even then he was No. 1 among the Democrats. This happened when he was a rather young senator. He hadn't been in there very long. Books have been written about all this, about how the Southerners wanted one of their own to be their leader, the Democratic leader. And I watched him first as minority leader and then as majority leader and really make something of it. And he had a super ego. I mean this ego just was tattooed all over him. You knew this man wanted to be on top of everything and on top of everyone really. So I couldn't believe that he would be willing to be cast in Kennedy's or anyone else's shadow as a vice presidential running mate.

DAITCH: I wondered whether, I mean to me it's an amazing thing because that could have very well--in some ways it did backfire on him even though he became president.

SPIVAK: He was very unhappy as vice president. I went on several of his vice presidential trips overseas. I didn't go on the major Kennedy trips overseas.

When we first started covering the White House together, Merriman, as the senior man, said we would divide the trips in half. He would take the good ones, and I'd take the bad ones. So I didn't go to Berlin with Kennedy. I went to Berlin with Johnson.

DAITCH: But that must have been an interesting trip, though.

SPIVAK: Oh, boy, was it ever! It was right after the Berlin Wall went up. I didn't go to Paris with Jack and Jackie. I went to the Middle East with Johnson. And on and on. But in any event, you know, Johnson would chat with us. On one of the trips there were just five reporters who went. So we went with him aboard his airplane. They called it *Air Force Two*, and it was configured, of course, just like *Air Force One*, the same thing. It was just the second of the two planes. We would chat. It was all off the record, but he knew us. He knew we'd keep it to ourselves. Or at least not quote him. But he was unhappy that he wasn't being used more as intermediary with the Senate.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

SPIVAK: Because that was his domain. And he just felt that he was being sidestepped. I never heard him say a word against Bob Kennedy. But later, of course, it became known that Bob Kennedy had a lot of antagonism toward him. I don't think that John Kennedy had antagonism toward him. But I doubt that John Kennedy liked him too much. And I think the feeling was mutual.

I was amazed that Johnson did it. Well, I don't know if he did it for the party or maybe Lady Bird [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Taylor Johnson].... I don't know if she's been quoted as saying or just been reported as feeling that if he stayed in the Senate driving himself the way he had been doing, because he would have been majority leader; as it turns out he would have been majority leader, but it could have gone the other way. But as the leader of the Democrats, he would have driven himself and driven himself, and this was a man who had had a heart attack. So she might have felt that being vice president was an easier row to hoe, little dreaming he'd become president in three years.

DAITCH: Yes, I'm sure nobody thought that. Even at the time it wasn't so much that being the vice president was necessarily.... Well, Nixon had just demonstrated that coming from the vice presidency was not necessarily a stepping-stone.

SPIVAK: Kennedy used Johnson to good effect in sending him overseas. His trips to the.... His trip to Berlin was very effective to the extent it could have been effective at that time. It was just within days after the wall had gone up. But they were trying to have a show of strength. They had an American column of vehicles go along the *Autobahn* through East Germany into Berlin to test whether the Russians or the East Germans would try to stop them, which they didn't. And then Johnson was on the reviewing stand when they got there. So that was part of it.

Then he went to the--this was a trip to the Middle East and Mediterranean areas. Also

that was to good effect. It wasn't the one where he invited the Pakistani camel driver over. That was an earlier one. I missed that one. But another trip I took with him.... No, he was president then when Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer] died. That was a different trip. But I took another trip with him overseas, too, and I can't remember where it was. Can you believe that? Well, you know, it's 40 years ago we're talking about.

DAITCH: Yes, it's a long time, and I would assume that a lot of it runs together to at least a certain extent.

SPIVAK: I'm surprised how much I do remember.

DAITCH: Yes, it's amazing. I can't remember what I had for lunch yesterday. But I'm grateful you can. I had heard somewhere that Johnson used to give out a bunch of little goodies when he went on these trips. I don't know why that just struck me. Just small little gifts.

SPIVAK: Possibly something that developed when he was a campaigner in America because politicians here give out little goodies when they go on trips, little trinkets and little mementos.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: Cufflinks, tie bars, various sorts. That might have been it. I don't know. But he did.

DAITCH: You remember him doing it?

SPIVAK: Yes, he did. I don't think you want to go into too much detail on the Johnson trips. I could go on about those for hours. They don't want to read that. But he handled himself extremely well on those trips.

DAITCH: Did people in the European countries.... I mean I suppose it seemed evident to people here, I mean certainly it was evident to the press, I don't know if it was more broadly evident among citizens that Kennedy and Johnson weren't working that closely together?

SPIVAK: No, but he made these trips at the president's request. He went because Kennedy assigned him to go. I won't even say asked him to go. I'm sure he asked him. But basically they were assignments.

DAITCH: But he was good at it, right? I mean he did a good job.

SPIVAK: Oh, yes. Yes. I remember in Greece, we didn't know it.... The State Department

briefs presidents and vice presidents at great length: where they're going and what the issues are and who the people are. And we were just a half dozen, five, six, I forget how many reporters on that trip but there weren't more than that, who were accompanying him. And so they gave us good briefing papers, too.

When we got to Greece, the one issue that was not in the briefing papers was the one issue that was in all the headlines in Greece. We couldn't read [translate] them, but we were told what they said. And that was a big controversy over Lower Macedonia--maybe it was Upper Macedonia; it was one of the Macedonias--whether Greece owned it or whether Yugoslavia, whatever the other country is adjoining Macedonia. And a big conflict over that. Johnson was by no means prepared, and he was furious about it. And he let us know he was furious about it.

So I was the pooler assigned to the state dinner there at the Greek president's residence, and there at the dining table, the time came for the toasts, and Johnson, who had probably had a few scotches before--he used to tell people he drank bourbon; he drank scotch--but he leaned over the table and stared at the Greek president and he said, "Mr. President...." Again, I could be wrong whether it was president or premier, but whoever the boss was. And he said, "I just want you to know that the United States will not in any circumstances..." And I was tense there with my pencil, wondering, my God, what's he going to do, put us into war right now over one of the Macedonias? He said, "...allow any of your territory to be violated." And it was said in such a mushy way. [Laughter]

So I went back to.... And in those days transatlantic telephones weren't reliable, and I was just ordered to use cable. That's not cable like CNN. That's a transatlantic cable. So I went to my room, and I typed out the story to take it to the cable office, which was across the street from I think it was the King George IV Hotel, I think, in Athens.

As I walked out of my hotel room, Johnson was walking down the corridor with these two Secret Service agents, and he was still wearing his white jacket, and he obviously had had a few. And he said, "Whatcha got there, Al?" The next thing I knew the piece of paper was out of my hands, and he was reading it. And screaming at me: "I didn't say that!" I said, "I know you didn't say it, but that was the purport and import of what you said." That's what it boiled down to. He said, "That's not what I said. Don't you write what it's supposed to amount to. You just write what I said." And to an extent he was right, not totally, but to an extent.

Then that shrewd devil said, "But I've got something better for you," and he fed me another story that was much better than that. I can't remember what it was. But I had to go back to my room and redo the whole thing with this new thing that was far better.

DAITCH: He is shrewd.

SPIVAK: That nobody else had. No, he was very shrewd. But I still think he did wonderful work on those trips.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. But did the people in Europe seem to feel that he was absolutely the American emissary, the emissary of JFK? Or did they have a feel for...?

SPIVAK: I'm not able to answer that. I don't know. I have to assume so. I know that the people there greeted him well, except Rome. He couldn't understand, when he went to Rome to see the pope, he couldn't understand why there were no crowds in the street. Someone said, "Mr. Vice President, they've been seeing dignitaries for 2,000 years." But everywhere else, huge crowds. The advance men had done their job, and the local governments had done their job. So he was pleased.

He followed closely every word that was written about him. Because the USIS . . . overseas it's USIS, or it was; things have changed since then. Here we call it USIA. But the embassy and their information people would give him the news clips every day. And probably because I was forced to use this slow transmission, the cable, rather than telephone or telex--this was our company wanting to save money--and so he wasn't getting too much pickup along the way.

He went to--this was in Tehran when he went to visit the tomb of the shah's father or grandfather. But it was this beautiful marble tomb, and he was there waiting for the shah to arrive. I was standing on the fringes. His secretary at the time, Mary Margaret--I can't remember her last name, but she's now Mary Margaret Valenti, she's Jack Valenti's wife--she came over to me and said, "Al, the vice president would like to talk to you." I figured, here, at the tomb? So I went over to him. He leaned over, and he whispered, "Al, you don't seem to be getting very good play on your stories. Is there anything I can do for you?" I told him, no, it's just that he wasn't seeing all the clips, that was all.

DAITCH: He was bored in the tomb there, so he wanted to think about you.

SPIVAK: He wasn't going to waste a minute.

DAITCH: Yes, that's funny. It was kind of kind of him. I don't know. I mean I suppose he's thinking about himself, too, in terms of....

SPIVAK: He was, but we got along well. He liked me. We had a bittersweet relationship. Some days he liked me, and some days he was very, very, very, very hairy.

DAITCH: Was it the same with Kennedy?

SPIVAK: Kennedy hid it a lot better. I'm sure it was the same. But he hid it much better.

DAITCH: Yes. You know, he has all those moments where he would be asked a question about the press and the relationship of the press to the government and all that, and he said the right things. He said that the press is the fourth--I want to say fourth estate, but that doesn't sound right. But, you know, that it was more or less like a fourth branch of government that keeps an eye on everything.

SPIVAK: Well, he was asked a question about May Craig [Elizabeth May Craig], the

woman reporter from Maine who had driven--she would drive him crazy press conference, after press conference. He came up with a humorous answer. He would have a humorous answer about the press. He could slough things off with a--when I say wise crack, I mean it in its best way, with a *bon mot*, with whatever. But if Johnson was mad at you, he didn't have a wise crack; he would let you know it.

DAITCH: He'd be mad.

SPIVAK: Yes, you knew it. But he got over it.

DAITCH: That must be kind of scary to have the vice president and then when he was president mad at you.

SPIVAK: Well, it was when he was president that he was mad at me. But it changed from day to day. But we got along well.

DAITCH: Yes, at least he would get over it.

SPIVAK: Oh, yes.

DAITCH: A nice thing. I guess Kennedy had his run-ins with the press, too.

SPIVAK: Well, he banned the *Herald Tribune* from the White House at one point. Yes, he had his run-ins along the way. I'm sure that he had his reasons to be furious with UPI and with me. I'm sure of it. He had to. Because we weren't always....

DAITCH: Can you think of anything in particular?

SPIVAK: We didn't write the party line. Oh, I can think of a beautiful example, yes. I have the clipping to show you. When they stayed in Hyannis Port, in what became known, it was called--it was named that by a *Boston Globe* reporter; not *Boston Globe*, it was a competing newspaper, which I don't even know if it exists anymore.... But anyway, this fellow named it "the compound." This didn't exist until he was elected president that I remember. They erected a fence around, a wooden fence--there's a name for the kind of wooden fence, but I can't remember what it is--but they were there behind that. And the press, to get into that, you had to go through a police gate, whatever.

Well, there was a man named Larry Newman who lived across the street from Kennedy. In his youth he had been a reporter for the Hearst newspapers. He'd been a war correspondent for them. Somehow or another, I don't know how the arrangement was made, he became what we called a "stringer," which was a local correspondent for us. He was paid on a services-rendered basis.

DAITCH: Like per story?

SPIVAK: And when we would go to Hyannis Port, he would invite me over to his house. I could stay there all day long staring at the Kennedy house. When I wasn't there, he or his wife or their neighbors or whatever, would fill me in on what was happening. Well, this one day the Kennedys were out sailing. The *Victura* was a little yacht they had, little sailboat they had. And Larry called me on the phone and said, "You'll never believe this. The sailboat just went aground, and the president was at the tiller." I said, "Oh, my God! You're kidding me." He said, "No, it really happened." I said, "How could it go aground? If it's aground, it wasn't deep." He said, "Oh, no, they just got out of the boat, and they pushed it off the mud or whatever and got back in." Well, there wasn't anything else happening that day.

DAITCH: So you reported it. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: So I wrote the story. The next morning.... Well, the *Washington Post* was flown up to Massachusetts very early every morning so that the president and his staff could read the *Post*, the Bible. Well, Kennedy was flying back to Washington the next morning, and I was in the pool aboard *Air Force One*. Pierre Salinger came over to me, and his face was red as could be, and he said, "What are you trying to do, make me lose my job?" And I said, "What's the problem, Pierre?" He said, "Look, look at this." And he showed me this clipping on the front page of the *Washington Post*. The headline was "KENNEDY SAILS RACING SLOOP IN BAY: CRAFT RUNS AGROUND WHILE DOCKING." And my byline on it at the bottom of the front page: "President Kennedy and other veteran sailors in the Kennedy Clan today ran aground in a 22-foot racing sloop while docking at a pier." And it went on from there.

Well, of course, this conjures up the image of the president's running the country aground or whatever. It's a very, very bad image story. And Pierre said, "The president told me it's not true." I said, "Pierre, it is true." He said, "How can you tell me that it's true when the president himself says it's not true?" I dipped into my little portfolio and said, "Here, Pierre, take this back and show it to the president." And it was a photograph of the whole group of them. They were laughing, but shoving the sailboat, whatever. One of the neighbors had taken the picture, and UPI ran the picture. And the photographer there had given it to me before we took off for the airplane.

Was he angry? Yes. Kennedy was very angry. Later on I asked Pierre what his reaction was when he saw the picture. He said, "He burst out laughing."

DAITCH: Yes, what can you do about that?

SPIVAK: See, now, Johnson wouldn't have burst out laughing. That's your comparison. Johnson would have harbored this for maybe a few days, and then he would have figured, oh, what the heck! Let's go on to other things.

DAITCH: Yes. The thought that popped into my mind was, you know, and then it went

immediately out, was that Johnson took himself more seriously than Kennedy. But I don't think that's the right way to put it. Because I think Kennedy took himself very seriously.

SPIVAK: He took himself very seriously. No, it's just that one fellow had a better sense of humor than the other. That's all. It's just a matter of the nature of the beast. I have a different sense of humor than my friends. I don't think it was anything of that nature.

DAITCH: We talked about Bob earlier. How was he when he was running his brother's campaign and as attorney general?

SPIVAK: I can't speak for when he was attorney general. I don't know. I was at the White House. I just know that he was attorney general, that's all. I have read the book with the transcripts of the Cuban Missile Crisis tapes and was very impressed by how he was so, so very vocal and active in that, which, of course, had nothing to do with being attorney general. It had to do with being the president's brother. As for during the campaign, I didn't deal with him much during the campaign because I was dealing with Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] or other staff members. But on the occasions when our paths would cross, it was sort of very agreeable. But I don't remember discussing campaign tactics, strategy or whatever with Bob. It would have been with Larry O'Brien or Pierre or with one of the staff people.

DAITCH: I wondered because I think Bob was always around.

SPIVAK: Or with Kennedy himself because he was available to us. He was right there. We were in the airplane with him. Now, most of the press was on a press plane. They called it the "zoo plane." And sometimes I was on that. But if I wasn't on *Air Force One*, one of my colleagues was. There was always an AP, a UPI man on the *Air Force One* or the presidential aircraft, whatever it was. And one or more other pool reporters.

DAITCH: Now, was that true during the campaign as well?

SPIVAK: Yes. The reason for the wire services getting the closeness to the president was in those days--and we're talking now about 40 years ago, and even less than 40 years ago--the wire services were the first line of communication for an official, for a politician, or a campaigner, for whomever. There was no cable television 24 hours a day. We were the 24-hour-a-day service. And day and night we would be transmitting our stories.

That didn't make us the royalty of the press corps. We were the grunts. We were the infantry. The royalty were the reporters for the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or even for some of the networks, Ray Scherer [Raymond L. Scherer] of NBC or.... I'm trying to remember others. But anyway, Bob Donovan [Robert J. Donovan] of the *Herald Trib* at

that time. He later went to the *Los Angeles Times*. But these were the.... Ed Folliard [Edward T. Folliard] of the *Washington Post*. I use some of these names because I've seen their names listed in oral histories. But they were the "high-class" people. We were, as I say, we were the front-line types because if something happened, immediately we got it on the wire within minutes. Whereas those folks weren't going to be in print until the next day or the next night or that same night or whatever. So that's why we always had the preference of being close by in the pools.

DAITCH: So those guys got a lot of their information from you, though, right?

SPIVAK: Oh, sure. Yes.

DAITCH: I mean that's where a lot of their longer, more in-depth reports might have come from?

SPIVAK: You use the word "in-depth." That's the whole point. They were able, having more time, to go into more depth.

DAITCH: Maybe do more background?

SPIVAK: Exactly. More analysis. Whatever. What we really were able to do is just go bang bang, here's what happened.

DAITCH: That must have been exhausting.

SPIVAK: It was. But I was in my early, well, in 1960 I was in my early thirties. You know, looking at it now at the age of 75, I was young. It was exhausting, but exhilarating.

DAITCH: Yes. I can see why it would be fun.

SPIVAK: I thought it was fun.

DAITCH: Do you think most of the other reporters shared your view? Or was there more like griping, oh, this is too tiring?

SPIVAK: Oh, I don't know. Certainly the other wire service reporters shared my view. But I don't know about the others.

DAITCH: I'm wondering whether you guys had many opportunities to see.... I mean Kennedy was ill at the time. He always had these problems that he was suffering with.

SPIVAK: Yes.

DAITCH: When his back was out, that was pretty obvious. Maybe he had to use crutches from time to time, something where you could see it.

SPIVAK: After he had been to Canada and planted the tree, that episode.

DAITCH: Yes. But were there other times when it was real.... I mean when he was a candidate, were you aware of that?

SPIVAK: Well, having covered the Senate, I knew that he had had the back problem. Because remember I covered McCarthy, and he didn't show up for the McCarthy censure vote because he was in the hospital.

DAITCH: Oh, right, right.

SPIVAK: At least that was the announced reason.

DAITCH: I was going to say, he got a lot of grief for that.

SPIVAK: Well, I didn't give him any grief, but I had the feeling he--this is a matter of opinion--I had the feeling he could have shown up if he really was anxious to show up. But considering.... I mean I knew his brother Bob liked Joe McCarthy, despite the political aspects of it, because once aboard.... I mentioned that we had been aboard the Skakel family boat that evening. This was while he was in one of his two counsel rides.... It was either then, as assistant counsel under Flanagan on the McCarthy subcommittee, the committee and subcommittee, because McCarthy headed both; or it was after he became the Democratic counsel for the committee before they were the McCarthy hearings.

Bob was standing there. We were sipping a drink on deck. It wasn't that big a boat. But a reporter named Herb Foster who was then with UP, and I was still with INS, and INS was still with me, and Bob said, "You fellows don't like Joe McCarthy. Why is that? All he's trying to do is find Communists in the government." We said, "Bob, we like Joe personally. It's just his tactics that turn us off." And he said, "I don't quite understand why you feel that way." So we knew where Bob stood.

DAITCH: He didn't understand why you thought that McCarthy's tactics were bully-ish?

SPIVAK: Well, I don't know whether he understood or not. But he didn't seem to want to understand. When McCarthy died in 1957.... And the reason this is fresh in my mind is because they recently made public a bunch of hearings that had been held out of print for about 50 years, and they were just made public by the committee. And so I endeavored to write a little story of reminiscences for a journalism publication, which

has turned them down. So this is fresh in my mind.

In '57 McCarthy died. I'm not a Catholic, but I attended either three or four solemn Requiem Masses, one or two in Washington and then one or two in Appleton, Wisconsin. I flew out there with the body for the burial. And Bob Kennedy was at each of those Masses right along with me. The final one of them, right before the burial, they had the press up in the choir loft of this church in Appleton, Wisconsin. And Kennedy leaned over to me, and he said, "Well, Al, have we got you yet?"

So even to McCarthy's death, he at least had warm enough feelings to go to his funeral, and he didn't happen to be in Appleton, Wisconsin. He had to go there. And he went to all the Masses leading up to them. Now, I didn't know as well at that time as I later learned just how much Joseph P. Kennedy, the father, the patriarch, was a fan of Joe McCarthy and had provided some financing for him. So did John Kennedy stay away because he wanted to, or because he had to? I don't know. I just have had my doubts. For better or for worse.

DAITCH: Well, it's an interesting kind of thing. I mean, you know, McCarthy was so.... I find it interesting that you say you liked him personally because I'm so, obviously....

SPIVAK: He was a charming guy so long as you weren't one of his victims.

DAITCH: Well, yes. When I think of him, he's been vilified for being such a bully and for ruining so many lives. But at the same time, I don't think about him as an individual.

SPIVAK: I don't think he's been vilified at all. I don't think he's been vilified enough in terms of what he did. But in terms of whether we got along with him personally, oh, yes. And vice versa. Well, he was a politician, and he was nice to reporters. Now and again, if one of them rubbed him the wrong way, he wasn't very nice with them. He could be very, very harsh. But, you know, reporters use sources, and sources use reporters. And sometimes maybe the smile isn't genuine, but at least it's there.

DAITCH: Yes, and it's a pleasant relationship.

SPIVAK: I was smiling at him, but I didn't feel that way toward him.

DAITCH: Right. The thing about Kennedy not showing up, you know, I think people have commented on how ironic.... [BRIEF ASIDE CONVERSATION] You know, people have talked about the irony of here John Kennedy is the person who wrote *Profiles in Courage*, and as a senator he....

SPIVAK: Don't think that didn't enter our minds. Yes.

DAITCH: Did people mention it?

SPIVAK: And yet how did we know whether he could go or not?

DAITCH: Yes, there's no way of knowing, I guess, for sure.

SPIVAK: That's right. Did people mention it? You bet they mentioned it. And certainly the other Democrats in the Senate mentioned it.

DAITCH: Really?

SPIVAK: Some did to me, yes.

DAITCH: It's kind of interesting. And then, you know, he turns around just a few years later and is running for, well, immediately running for vice president and then running for president a few years after that. And flipped so many opinions so quickly, it just seems a little.... You know, from the senator who was not terribly effective or not terribly aggressive, and didn't take maybe really strong stands on much, much that's memorable. I mean you don't remember anything about it.

SPIVAK: Africa. Now, I don't remember exactly what. I just remember that he was very interested in it. But I don't happen to remember any specifics at all. But I know that it carried over into the campaign in '60 when he was in Hyannis Port and was visited by one of the African leaders, who I probably had never heard of; or if I had, I couldn't spell it. I learned to. I don't remember who it was. And we wondered, why is he doing that? Well, you know, we weren't smart enough to realize how important Africa was, but he was.

DAITCH: Well, this thing about, you know, Nixon claiming that he had more experience than Kennedy and, sure, technically he was vice president for eight years. But on the other hand, Kennedy was a very sophisticated guy in terms of having traveled and studied and read and talked to lots of world leaders even as a young man.

SPIVAK: And having written *Why England Slept*.

DAITCH: Yes. Absolutely.

SPIVAK: As a youth. And having been in Europe in the lead-in to World War II. Oh, yes.

DAITCH: And paying attention. I mean asking people questions, talking about it.

SPIVAK: Being a reporter covering the origins of the UN in San Francisco. I think it was for my company, if I'm not mistaken. It was for Hearst, but I don't know whether it was for INS.

DAITCH: You know, when the topic came up in the campaign and Nixon would bring up, “Well, I have more experience,” did Kennedy sort of bring those things up? I don’t get the feeling that he....

SPIVAK: You know, I don’t really remember the specifics of it. My guess is, yeah, he might have had more experience, but it’s all bad. Or it’s all wrong. In that debate that I took part in, for example, none of my questions were the lead item in the news. The lead item was whether.... Oh, God, what were those islands off of the coast of China?

DAITCH: Quemoy and Matsu?

SPIVAK: Quemoy and Matsu, yes. Ed Morgan asked the question on that. I frankly didn’t even know what Quemoy and Matsu were that night. Kennedy was on target with his answers, and so was Nixon. The two of them were. But the point is that Kennedy certainly was not in Nixon’s shadow on that one.

DAITCH: And didn’t seem to be on much of anything.

SPIVAK: On the issue of Cuba--or Cuber as he called it--it struck us that, yes, Nixon by virtue of his vice presidency had more experience. But Kennedy was so good at stating his positions that it certainly didn’t impress me that the difference mattered.

DAITCH: He seemed like a quick study. I’ve heard about this him many times, that he was able to read things, absorb them, assimilate them.

SPIVAK: He learned to speed read.

DAITCH: I’ve always heard that.

SPIVAK: Yes. Well, I got that from an eyewitness. I remember asking her, “What is speed reading?” and she showed me. She had learned, too. She was one of the secretaries on the staff. To the staff, that is. Yes, he read like a shot. And retained, you know. But that’s when we got to know him and got to realize just how sharp and how bright he was.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. Well, again, I mean there’s so much about him. He had sort of a mediocre record in Congress. His school record is nothing to really jump up and down about.

SPIVAK: Quite the opposite.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. You know, it turns out....

SPIVAK: I say that only with the knowledge of books that I've read. He was a young guy that played around. So was I. I didn't care.

DAITCH: Right. Exactly. So once he was elected, I've always thought that one of the first things to happen was the Bay of Pigs.

SPIVAK: It was one of the first things that happened. You bet it was.

DAITCH: I suppose after.... You know, he's building up, gotten himself into our good graces as a nation, everybody is now more or less in love with John Kennedy. And the first thing that happens is this terrible mess.

SPIVAK: I wouldn't say everybody. Remember he won by a very, very slim margin. But he certainly was greeted well by the press. He had just fabulous press. There's no question about that. On the Bay of Pigs, of course, we've gone into that effort of his to make it clear we weren't going in there. But after the disaster, and this is an episode I remember well, I was in the lobby there in the West Wing. Everything was different then. It was built differently. The press room was just a tiny little place, and it was like a garbage bin; it was awful, just a few desks, telephones. I mean now they have this gigantic press room with theater seating and whatever there. Things were different then.

I was in the lobby when one of the secretaries in Pierre Salinger's office came to me and said, "The president would like to see you." And I said, "Me!" And she said, "Yes." I said, "Where is he?" She said, "He's in Salinger's office." I said "Where is he?" because I didn't know if I was supposed to go to his office or what. I knew I was going to have to be led wherever it was.

So I went into Salinger's office, and Kennedy was standing there, and he was obviously furious. Well, I knew there was nothing to be furious at me about; I hadn't done anything. And he said.... *U.S. News & World Report* was coming out with, they had a column called "Whispers," which was sort of a gossipy type of Washington column. And he said, "They're coming out with this column saying that I'm very angry with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and at the CIA over the Bay of Pigs." And I figured, why is he telling me this? And I said, "Well, yes, sir?" He said, "Well, what can I do about it?" I said, "Well, Mr. President, how do they know this?" He said, "Oh, you weren't on that plane, *Air Force One*, were you, the press pool. I talked to the press pool on the airplane, and I told them this *off the record*. And now the reporter for *U.S. News*...." And I remember his name. Well, I won't use it. He's dead anyway. But he said, "Now, this guy's using it even though it was off the record. What can I do?"

I said, "Mr. President, Merriman was on the plane with you." I said, "I hate to pass the buck, but not having been there, and not having Merriman's experience, I suggest we bring Merriman in. He's at home. I can have him come here. He can be here in a half hour.

Would that help?" He said, "Yes, please do." And I did. But the story was true. But here's a grand contrast to today. This is July 26, 2003. But John Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs said, "I am responsible. I was responsible." And he didn't say the CIA or the Joint Chiefs were responsible. But in a controversy over the last couple of weeks over 16 words in the State of the Union Speech, our current president said, "Oh, I cleared it with the CIA." And his staff said, "It was cleared with the CIA," or whatever. Of course that story has changed a million times. But John Kennedy said, "I was responsible." And I think that's a wonderful contrast. I think it is, anyway.

DAITCH: Yes, I agree. It's an interesting thing. So what happened? What did Merriman Smith do to help him? Could he do anything since the story was true?

SPIVAK: He said, "Mr. President, you've got to be more careful what you tell reporters off the record on your airplane." And Merriman was right. It's a lesson that Kennedy had to learn. He was new.

DAITCH: Yes, and young. I mean you forget that the guy was only 42 or 43.

SPIVAK: That's right, that's right. It's not that he wasn't used to dealing with reporters. He just wasn't used to two-timing reporters, I suppose. And this was a two-timing reporter, who should never have used an off the record statement.

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

DAITCH: That's right, yes. In a way it sounds a little bit naive. But on the other hand, no wonder he had such a good relationship with reporters.

SPIVAK: Naive is a word I would never use with John Kennedy. Never. But it's just that he didn't know this particular reporter well. We did, his colleagues did. You know, the other people.... Merriman didn't use it; didn't even tell me about it. No one did. That doesn't mean it wouldn't have gotten out. There was a terrible thing that reporters did, and I guess they still do: They hear something off the record. Then they tell it to a reporter who wasn't there, and that reporter figures, well, it wasn't told to me off the record, and that person uses it. That's how so many of these off-the-record stories get out. I think it's reprehensible. But remember I stopped being a reporter in 1967 and went into public relations where I became a victim.

DAITCH: [Laughter] Right. Exactly. You switched positions.

SPIVAK: And attitudes.

DAITCH: Well, it's hard really because, you know, on the one hand you are a reporter, your job is to reveal things and tell stories. I don't meant stories in the sense of fiction. But to tell what's happening. But at the same time, you damage everyone's credibility with the president or whoever it is that you anger.

SPIVAK: Of course.

DAITCH: By saying something like that. It's a difficult relationship.

SPIVAK: Well, this caused Kennedy, this episode about the Joint Chiefs and the CIA, it caused him some short-term grief. But I don't think it caused him any lasting grief because he changed the leadership of the CIA. I forget who was the head, whether Dulles [Allen W. Dulles] still was or whoever. But he made some changes there. And he made some changes in the Joint Chiefs because they have fixed terms; but they didn't get re-nominated, I don't believe.

DAITCH: Right. Well, and it just taught him how to take their advice.

SPIVAK: But that was Merriman's advice to him. It's strange. There have been several times when he would ask a reporter his opinion on what should I have done? or what should I do? That's one that comes to mind. There's one episode where he wasn't asking, and a reporter suggested something. That was during the campaign. I won't go into that. It's a subject I just don't want to go into. But he, as events turned out, he could have used some more advice on taking care, of being very careful. Bob Dallek's [Robert Dallek] book indicates that.

DAITCH: Yes. All of those things about his, you know, the health things that he was hiding, the womanizing that he wasn't hiding.

SPIVAK: Well, you know, you asked about health earlier. We knew about his back and the crutches. We remember after that Canadian episode when he was on crutches, to get him on *Air Force One*, they had to lift him up in a cherry-picker crane. Somehow that picture's been used since then as if he always had to be lifted up in a crane to get on the plane. Which, of course, was a lot of nonsense. But when he walked, you could see that he had a brace that he had on. We knew, we were told, when he was in the campaign that between stops he would be having his back massaged. And we had other suspicions, too. But that's irrelevant. He was definitely having his back massaged, whatever else.

DAITCH: Among other things, maybe.

SPIVAK: Yes. Whatever else might or might not have been happening. We had no way of knowing that. He had his own compartment closed off to us, as he should have. Now, the Addison's Disease--and this is rather alive in my mind because a member of my family's come up with that, not immediate, but a member of the family. But it was a flat-out lie he told about that during the campaign.

DAITCH: That's right.

SPIVAK: From Pierre Salinger. I don't think it changed the course of history. But if lying isn't right, that wasn't right.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: Now, would he have been elected if people knew he had Addison's Disease? I personally doubt that it would have mattered. I don't think very many people know what it is.

DAITCH: No. And especially because he looked so vigorous. It wouldn't have mattered what they said about him almost because of the way he appeared.

SPIVAK: Well, that word "vigor," that was part of the mantra: vigor, vigor, vigor. So maybe if people knew about all his diseases.... I don't know if it's Richard Reeves or somebody has written a book that goes into all of his childhood diseases and adolescent diseases and early manhood diseases. And some of it is rather horrifying when I read it.

DAITCH: Well, Dallek goes into it a lot of detail.

SPIVAK: That's right. It was excerpted in the *Atlantic*. That's where I read it, not yet having opened Dallek's book, although I intend to read it through. But I don't know how he.... Well, number one, you don't know he survived. But number two, you don't know how he was able to show the vigor.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. And he did. I mean one of the things that Dallek has said--he was at the Library a while back, and it was very interesting to hear him talk. You know, as a historian, Kennedy's life has been well documented, and we have a few things about the medical that have come out recently and a little bit more detail about the womanizing. But those are things that Dallek....

SPIVAK: A little more?

DAITCH: But Dallek wanted to ask the question: All right, so now that we know about those things, did it really affect his presidency? Did it really affect his

decision-making? Did it affect, you know....

SPIVAK: Don't forget the word "medication."

DAITCH: The medications. Absolutely. And both in the good sense and the bad sense. In the good sense that he's treating his disorders and it's helping him, but in the negative sense of we don't know if it might be affecting his judgment. I don't want to take away the surprise you'll have from reading Dallek's book, but....

SPIVAK: It won't be a surprise because of the excerpts already. No, there won't be any surprises. It's a surprise to me in terms of having been a reporter on the scene with no inkling of it. Now, we knew he was getting medication. Dr. Travell [Janet G. Travell] was called in to help him on his back, supposedly. She supposedly prescribed the rocking chair. I say supposedly. I'm not disputing it. I just don't know.

But the White House doctor, Admiral Burkley [George G. Burkley], wonderful, wonderful guy. Oh, I'm so fond of him. I guess he's not around anymore. But I was so fond of him. But I'm sure he was furious about Janet Travell being called in. I have an in-law who's in the medical profession who wonders how, with all that medication, he was able to be as sharp, as keen as he was. But we don't know how sharp and keen he was. We know how sharp and keen we perceived him as being. And I don't think it affected his presidency. That's my personal feeling. I have nothing to base it on.

DAITCH: Yes. Dallek came to the same conclusion after a lot of study. He said literally when he was working on the biography, he tried to place the time line sort of side by side as best he could and the president's various battles with different illnesses, where they got better and worse at different times. And to overlap that with various moments that were.... I mean he had so many crisis moments in his presidency. And he just doesn't find that there was a moment when he did something that seemed unreasonable or out of character or of questionable judgment. So that's his take on it. Someone else may come along and say something different.

SPIVAK: You know, this question of whether his election could have been affected by broader knowledge of his physical condition and his medication, whatever, which is the reason they didn't tell the truth about the Addison's disease. At least I gather that's the reason. I don't know if that would have mattered. Eisenhower was reelected after a heart attack.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: A serious heart attack. Johnson was running after having had a heart attack that was relatively serious. Who can ever know?

DAITCH: That's right, who can say? I was just struck recently, though. In fact one of the

books that I brought with me was Sorensen's collection of Kennedy's speeches. You know, I was just going through some of them, and I was struck by the contrast between him and our current president.

SPIVAK: Yes, Kennedy could pronounce "nuclear." [Laughter] If nothing else.

DAITCH: At the very least. But there were a couple of places in which he talked a lot about the importance of public officials having ethical conduct and that sort of thing. I wondered where does it fit in to that sort of... It's not an ideology, but an ethical stance, so where does it fit in for him to be lying about his medical condition.

SPIVAK: Starting more basically, and I don't mean to offend you as a New Englander or a current New Englander, but where does it fit in with Boston politics?

DAITCH: Yes, well, that's a good point. I'm a recent, I'm a transplant New Englander, so you can say what you want.

SPIVAK: Oh, I have nothing against New Englanders. But the fact of the matter is he was a tough campaigner, and he was a tough president, with maybe a few exceptions along the way; I can't put my finger on them. But I think as presidents go, he was ethical enough, he was ethical enough for me. But my problems with him weren't ethics. I don't think there was anything unethical about his womanizing. I just think it was stupid. And that's a word I would seldom, or, I guess I would never use about Kennedy, but on that I would.

DAITCH: Well, and again, it's very poor judgment from somebody.... And I thought the same thing about Clinton [William J. Clinton], whom I admire in many, many ways. It's incredibly poor judgment. Kennedy got by with it for various reasons.

SPIVAK: And I don't think Clinton deserved what he got.

DAITCH: No, I don't either.

SPIVAK: But, of course, I must confess I'm not only a Democrat, but I was a professional Democrat after leaving the news business. I worked in the Democratic National Committee. I worked in Humphrey's campaign in '68. So I'm biased; I admit it. Although there are a lot of Democrats who don't like Clinton, part of it being the womanizing, his womanizing, part of it being his avoidance of the draft. All kinds of reasons. But you certainly can't accuse John Kennedy of avoiding the draft. My God, he was a war hero.

DAITCH: Yes. He never mentioned that, did he? I mean rarely. It's just not something he

used to wave the bloody flag or anything.

SPIVAK: He didn't have to. Everyone knew.

DAITCH: Well, there was that book written, right?

SPIVAK: Yes, Bob Donovan wrote *PT-109*, and the movie was based on it. I don't know if that was while he was president or not.

DAITCH: It was because it was screened at the White House.

SPIVAK: Cliff Robertson [Clifford Parker Robertson, III] starred in it.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. It was screened at the White House while he was still president.

SPIVAK: Okay.

DAITCH: And I think he was reasonably pleased with it.

SPIVAK: Well, every now and again he'd have a reunion with some of his old Navy buddies. Red Fay [Paul "Red" Fay], who was one of his appointees, had been. I don't know whether he was a shipmate or just a Navy person. But when he would write about Fay, it would always be in connection with the *PT-109* incident. And Kennedy didn't have to boast about it. It was there. It was well known. He didn't have to put on a flight suit and land on a carrier.

DAITCH: Right. And, well, he could have, but it probably would have belabored the point to the extent that it would have been silly. But I've always thought that was kind of impressive.

SPIVAK: The only time I remember him on a Navy ship was when he was out watching a regatta from a cruiser offshore. But I'm sure he was on them other times. Yes, he was. Another time he slept aboard one for some reason, but I can't remember what it was.

DAITCH: There are some nice pictures of that one when he was watching the regatta. Jackie was with him that day. I think there are some nice photos of that floating around. You know, they look happy and like they're having fun. Speaking of Jackie, it just came up, did you see her very often after the campaign? I mean obviously during the campaign she was pregnant and didn't participate that much. But at the White House?

SPIVAK: I wouldn't say often, but from time to time. Again, being part of the press pool,

if they flew somewhere together, I would see her. We didn't chat. I don't even know if she knew who I was. She probably did. She knew what was going on. I remember one time, the helicopter landed on the Ellipse behind the White House instead of on the White House grounds, as they later came to do. Or maybe there was a reason they did it that night. And we were walking--they were walking. Let's get this right. *They* were walking. This little press pool was walking slightly behind the Secret Service; who were walking behind them. And we could hear her very audibly saying, "Jack, would you please ask those agents to stay farther behind?"

When they went to Middleburg, for example, we would see her going to church with him on a Sunday. Or wherever they were, at Newport. Again, I'm not a Catholic, but usually they had the press that covered him in church--he hated the press being there, and, very frankly, I hated being there. But we had to do it. They would have us in the rear, the back pews. But at Newport for some reason they had the press up front. And Charlie Bartlett [Charles L. Bartlett], who was one of his close friends and was a columnist, he was a good friend of mine, too, some weeks later came over to me and said, "Al, you know what the president said about you the other week?" I said, "No, what?" He said, "Look, there's Al Spivak up in front counting his beads."

But we would see her on occasions like that, on public occasions or going to church or that sort of thing. But there were a few reporters, yes, who would see them on a social basis. I was not among that chosen few. There were White House parties, and Bill Lawrence [William L. Lawrence], who was either *New York Times* or ABC at that time --he switched; he had been at the *Times* and went to ABC--I know that he was invited from time to time to parties at the White House. Carleton Kent of the *Chicago Sun Times*. A young man named Tom Ross [Thomas B. Ross], who was with the *Chicago Sun Times*, but later wound up in.... He was an assistant secretary of defense under Carter [James Earl Carter, Jr.]. He was in public relations, whatever. But there were a select few reporters who did see them on a social basis.

The only time I saw them on a social basis was every year at Palm Beach they would have a Christmas party. I can't say every year. I remember one year that they had a Christmas party for the press at the Kennedy home in Palm Beach. I had a very brief but very nice chat with her and the president. Of course I chatted with the president from time to time anyway. But one of the few times I ever chatted with her.

DAITCH: Did you ever.... I mean was she around the White House? I had heard that she would sometimes bring the children over to see him or something like that.

SPIVAK: Oh, I'm sure that's true. But we wouldn't have known anything about that because we were out in the press room or the lobby.

DAITCH: So you wouldn't have seen them going past or anything like that.

SPIVAK: Well, the other times we saw her was when she hated us to see her, and that's when they went out on the boats in the various places. They went, either at

Hyannis Port or Newport or Palm Beach. They loved going out boating, and then picnicking on land with the children. She water skied. Whatever. And the wire services used to charter a fishing boat to follow them. That was duty that I absolutely hated. Number one, I hate being on boats. Number two, I just didn't like prying. I'm essentially a pretty shy person. I don't like snooping and prying into people's private lives. What they're doing from a public standpoint is another matter. This is to me, they were.... Let them go out and have a good time.

But the real ringleader in this was my leader, Merriman Smith. I've mentioned him a number of times. I ought to add, best reporter I've ever known in my life. He started covering the White House with Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], Franklin D., not Theodore [Theodore Roosevelt]. And Merriman's attitude and the AP's Doug Cornell [Douglas B. Cornell], he was an old veteran stemming from Roosevelt days, their attitude was where the president is, we must be. We must follow him everywhere. And the minute you stop following him somewhere, they expect you to stop following him everywhere.

So we insisted on chartering our boat. When Roosevelt and Truman [Harry S. Truman] were on their yachts, they had press with them. But there were only a few reporters covering the White House in those days. And they didn't care. But part of this was protecting the privacy of the kids. That was part of it, but not always.

So they would have Coast Guard boats escorting and Secret Service in little jet-powered speed boats accompanying the president on his.... I use the word "yacht." But it's the *Honey Fitz* and the *Patrick J.*, were two of the boats I remember. The Coast Guard did all they could to keep us as far away as possible, while tourists were coming in close to the presidential boat. And this infuriated us. It didn't do us any good, but.... So we used binoculars and more high-powered binoculars. We didn't hide who we were. We had a little banner that said, "White House Press," that we flew from our mast. In Palm Beach the *Honey Fitz* was there. It wasn't deliberate, it just happened that we chartered a little boat called the *Honey Chile*.

DAITCH: Oh, cute!

SPIVAK: So you had the *Honey Fitz* being chased by the *Honey Chile*, and this is just a little fishing boat with a skipper and a nice female first mate. And there were only the two wire service reporters, two photographers, and maybe one or two other people aboard. Off of the coast the people on the *Honey Fitz* would try to fish. And we could see Prince Radziwill [Stanislas Albert Radziwill] and Peter Lawford [Peter Sydney Vaughn Lawford] and various others tossing their lines out.

This one day, suddenly out of nowhere because there was never any communication between us, this one day suddenly the radio crackled, and it was *Honey Fitz* to *Honey Chile*, *Honey Fitz* to *Honey Chile*, knowing the *Honey Chile* was a fishing boat. And the skipper, he was bewildered. He said, "The *Honey Chile*, the *Honey Fitz* come in." And they said, "Will you please tell us where the fish are?" And he said, "It doesn't matter where the fish are. If you keep going at the speed you're going, you're not going to catch anything."

DAITCH: [Laughter] That's great.

SPIVAK: Oh, we had a horrible episode when they were out in the Gulf Stream, very calm waters. And the commanding admiral of the *Honey Chile* said, "My God! They're swimming out there!" And we said, "Of course. Why not? That's why they're out here. They're swimming." He said, "Don't you realize there are sharks in these waters?" We said, "How do you know that?" He said, "Because it's the Gulf Stream. It's where the merchant shipping goes. They toss out their garbage, and the sharks come in; it attracts them." And we figured, oh, this guy must know what he's talking about.

There was a reporter for the AP, Frances Lewine was her name. And even though we competed, still and all, we were both there together. We weren't going to be unfair to each other on that story. So we both agreed that we wouldn't run a story until we checked it further. Well, that night I was invited to a cocktail party by some local people, professional people, doctors, lawyers, whatever. I don't know why I was invited or even remember who they were. But they lived there, and I said, "By the way, do you ever go swimming in the Gulf Stream?" They said, "Are you crazy?" I said, "Why not?" He said, "There are sharks all over the place."

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: That was good enough for me. So we ran the story. I hope to God I didn't say "shark-infested waters." I hope I didn't use the cliché. But whatever I did, I said, "Local people said, and the captain of a fishing boat cruising nearby said." This infuriated the Kennedys. Well, you asked, was he ever angry? Yes, he was angry. He felt we were intervening with their fun, with their pleasure. She was doubly angry, as she could be, at the press. And Salinger was always the go-between to let it be known, poor guy. He got it from both sides.

But after that day, out of stubbornness, they kept swimming there. But the Secret Service had automatic weapons on the ready in case they saw any sharks. And I mean on their little jet speed boats. I call them jets. They were called jet boats or something. They were high-powered speed boats. They were ready. And I talked to a Secret Service agent, he said, "Al, we were so glad you ran the story. But damn if they didn't keep going out there."

DAITCH: I can't believe that. Wow!

SPIVAK: And another time, I wasn't on our boat at Newport; Merriman was. But the Coast Guard came by and deliberately came by in such a way that it almost swamped the press boat.

DAITCH: Wow!

SPIVAK: Well, news people did what news people do. They write stories about it. And Merriman's story was front page in the *New York World Telegram* and God

knows how many other papers. The Coast Guard never did that again.

DAITCH: I'll bet.

SPIVAK: I was there one day when an AP photographer, Harvey Georges was his name, and the Secret Service would have their people aboard the Coast Guard boat. They came over to us and said, "The Kennedys want you to be farther off." Harvey said, "You can't tell us to do that." And he said, "Yes, we can." And Harley said, "Not on the high seas you can't." [Laughter] To me it was one of the magic moments. So we went farther out. We didn't care. We had binoculars. But frankly all I wanted to know was they were alive. I wanted to know that they were safe, that nobody took a shot at them. And all I had to say in the story was that they picnicked. I didn't have to say what they ate. But I didn't like it. I hated those assignments.

Oh, the other beautiful part of that was on this one occasion, I focused the binoculars on the *Honey Fitz* and saw John Kennedy focusing binoculars right back at me. [Laughter] I wondered why the heck he would want to look at me, but he wasn't looking at me. One of the Secret Service agents was a newly-wed, and asked if we would take his wife aboard with us so she could sunbathe and enjoy the cruise at sea, and she was wearing a bikini. That's who he was looking at.

DAITCH: Oh, shame on him. That's great.

SPIVAK: So in terms of, did we see Jackie? No, not really. That time we went to the party at the house in Palm Beach, there was a fellow named Bill Curtiss [William Curtiss]. He was a Press Club bar buddy of mine. He wasn't really a reporter. But he wanted to be in the press group covering Kennedy at Palm Beach because he had a place of his own in Palm Beach. He came from a very wealthy family. And he had a close friend in Washington who was a reporter for a British newspaper, who got him credentials by saying he was covering for this paper.

So this fellow Bill, who wasn't too swift--I can say that, the poor fellow's deceased--but he wasn't too swift. He said to me, "Al, I've known Jack and Jackie since long before their wedding. I've known them both for years." He said, "When I'm greeted by her, do I say, 'Hello, Mrs. Kennedy,' or 'Hello, Mrs. President'?" So I told him which to say. But other.... No, I didn't see much of Jackie.

DAITCH: I knew that she sort of stayed away and didn't really care for the.... And I've always been sympathetic towards that.

SPIVAK: She did not like the press covering the family's private activities and certainly invading the privacy of the children. I didn't blame her. I didn't blame her a bit. I still don't.

DAITCH: Yes, I wouldn't either. Apparently she did get more hostile about it than

President Kennedy did.

SPIVAK: Oh, definitely, yes. But she took out some of her hostility on him. Oh, we got that very clearly from Pierre Salinger.

DAITCH: No kidding!

SPIVAK: Because, yes, Pierre would come to us and say, “Al, Mrs. Kennedy is giving the president hell. You’ve got to do something.” He told me, and he told other reporters the same thing. One time.... They put up a little playground on the South Lawn of the White House. To shield the vision, they planted some kind of stuff there. I used to know what the plants were. And the *Washington Star* wrote a big story about how rhododendron or whatever they were--it must have been rhododendron because I couldn’t spell it--the *Washington Star* did a front page story on it. And the president got all kinds of heck on that from Mrs. Kennedy. They got the Park Service to come around and say that this was part of the long-term planning for the White House. Which of course it wasn’t.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. That’s funny. Did you ever see the kids, I mean in terms of...?

SPIVAK: Yes. I remember when John Glenn [John H. Glenn, Jr.] had his flight, the first manned orbit in space. The next day or two later, Kennedy flew to Cape Canaveral to see the astronauts, particularly Shepard [Alan B. Shepard, Jr.] and Glenn. The family was aboard because they were going then on to Washington with the *Mercury* astronauts. There were seven of them. Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] was aboard, and she came up and started kibitzing with the press people aboard. And we just were nice to her. Everything on the plane was off the record unless they told you it was on. It was a pleasant experience. She was a nice little girl. And we saw little John-John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.], but he was too young to have anything to do with. But very limited exposure, very limited.

Now, Helen Thomas would have had much more because she was covering, as they say, covering the East Wing. She was covering that side of the White House. That’s what brought her in. She eventually came to cover the rest of the White House, too. That took a lot of effort on her part. Those were the days when women didn’t have as easy a time as they later came to have.

DAITCH: Yes. She’s funny, though. When I talked to her the other day, she didn’t want to dwell on that. She wanted to talk about what’s happening today. I thought....

SPIVAK: Which is, I would think, of limited interest to the John F. Kennedy Library.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. We kept trying to get back. But, you know, she’s just wonderful because she’s so still engaged.

SPIVAK: Oh, I can't believe the energy she has. She's about eight or so years older than I am. She has this energy. I see her from time to time and talk to her from time to time. But it's amazing.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. She was wonderful.

SPIVAK: But I'm trying to think of another episode or two. Oh, yes, another one that infuriated the Kennedys: I kept this clip. I don't know why. But there was a very, very wonderful woman--was, I don't know, she may still be alive--named Marie Smith [Marie D. Smith]. She was a reporter for the Style Section of the *Washington Post*. Really, basically, women's features. She called me and said, "Al, do you know anything about a nursery being set up at Otis Air Force Base for Mrs. Kennedy?" She was then expecting her third child. And I said, "No, but I'll check." Because Marie was a good friend. She said, "Well, I'm calling because I know Filene's store in Boston has sent a lot of furniture to Otis, and someone at Filene's that she knew told her that..." Either she or a source knew. "...it was for a nursery being established at Otis." Well, you know, normally an Air Force base hospital doesn't have a nursery. Why not? Air Force wives have children. But since the Kennedys always landed at Otis when they went to Cape Cod and took off from there, a buzz ran through her [Marie's] head, and she wondered.

So I called our fellow Larry Newman up at Hyannis Port and said, "Do you know anything about a nursery at Otis?" He said, "No, but I'll find out." And he did. And I wrote a story. Oh, first of all, we went to Pierre Salinger and said, this is Marie and me, this was at a public briefing. In those days the briefings were held in the press secretary's office with all the reporters standing, the press secretary standing. Now, they have this in a doggone convention hall practically at the White House. But we didn't have as many reporters then and no live television or even taped television. It was just the reporters.

So we asked Pierre if there was any truth to this. Most of the reporters couldn't have cared less. Pierre said, "I'll check into it." He came back out, and he said, "It's absolutely untrue." We said, "Pierre, are you sure about that?" He said, "I'm sure. I have checked this out on the highest authority at the White house." We know what highest authority means. So Marie said, "Al, I'm going to do a story tonight saying, attributing it to sources, saying that it's happening." I said, "Marie, I'm going to do one, too."

So I did a little story. It didn't add up to much. And Pierre came out in a rage saying the president had given him unshirted hell; that we were lying about this. We had been told it was untrue. And I said, "How does the president know it's untrue? Has he been to Otis Air Force Base, has he been to the hospital there? Does he know it?" He said, "Godfrey McHugh [Godfrey T. McHugh], the Air Force aide, has assured me of this." Well, the minute I heard that, I knew I wouldn't trust the information. We didn't think too much of Godfrey McHugh, may he rest in peace. He was an Air Force general who was the Air Force aide. He used to tell us aboard the airplane during Johnson's time how wonderfully we were doing in Vietnam.

DAITCH: Yes, more untrustworthy information.

SPIVAK: So anyway, I wrote this little story. Pierre, as I say, was in a state of rage. I said, "Well, Pierre, I'm sorry. I have my facts there. All my facts are accurate." "It can't be! Your sources are wrong." I said, "Okay, I'm going to go back to my sources. But if I do, I'm going to get more information and use it." And he was denying this publicly, which is embarrassing if somebody in the White House is denying your story. So I got more information. Wrote another story on top of my first story. We used to call that in wire service jargon a "first lead" or a "new top" or whatever. A more expanded story on it. By the end of the day, I'd done three or four of these things, and it was driving Pierre crazy. And, as I say, the poor guy was in the middle. But we had to defend ourselves.

So for the next day I wrote a story that the *World Telegram* ran. It was an open letter; it was a memo to Pierre Salinger. "That suite at Otis Air Force Base, Massachusetts, which you described as a residence for visiting officers, is equipped with incubator, bassinet, and baby scale. There's a nursery there, too." And then the story went on and on and on. Pierre saw this, and he said, "Al, what can I do? If the highest authority tells you it's untrue, what can you do?" I said, "You did what you had to do, Pierre, and I did what I had to do."

But, yes, they would occasionally get angry at us. Now this is getting angry over something piddling. Why not have a nursery there? Janet Travell was the one who ordered it done. Now whether it was done with McHugh's knowledge, probably not. Or whether it was.... Well, it had to be done with McHugh's knowledge. But probably not with John Kennedy's knowledge. And possibly not with Mrs. Kennedy's knowledge. The reason Travell wanted the suite ready was in case she was up in Hyannis Port and suddenly was going to have a baby.

DAITCH: Yes. And she had had some problems.

SPIVAK: As it turned out, she had it in Boston. And they had severe problems. The poor baby died, yes. Patrick J. I guess. Patrick [Patrick Bouvier Kennedy].

DAITCH: Yes. And it was probably not a terrible idea. It's just funny some of the things that get hotly denied.

SPIVAK: Well, think back. If the stuff that's now being written about had come out then, think of what the attitude would have been then. We had our suspicions then. I know in my own case, I couldn't have cared less, and I think most of the reporters couldn't have. If I had written anything, I don't think our wire services would have carried it because you couldn't prove it. I mean I had good reason to have my suspicions, including one young lady who told me about it. She didn't give me all the details. She said that she said, "No." And he respected it.

I still say to this day, so what? Another time, in Palm Springs, I didn't make that trip. But a very well-known blonde movie star, not Marilyn Monroe, a different one, was seen exiting the house one morning. And she hadn't been seen entering that morning, so, you know, the suspicions went around. Everybody was joking about it, laughing about it. Who

cared?

DAITCH: Right. In the big scheme of things.

SPIVAK: To this minute I say, who cares? The only reason.... You can't quite say that in Clinton's case. It was the White House, it was the Oval Office. That's a little different, that's a little different.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, I mean certainly they're.... I think Kennedy probably had his in....

SPIVAK: As a matter of fact, it's very different.

DAITCH: Well, yes. The other thing is, too, that I find it interesting that probably his political rivals knew about it, as well. I don't think it was a big secret.

SPIVAK: You can bet your bottom dollar did they. But they didn't know how to use it either.

DAITCH: Or maybe didn't even want to. It just wasn't the kind of thing that seemed kosher, you know, at that point in our history.

SPIVAK: They didn't care about kosher. During the Johnson Administration, in the '64 campaign, Walter Jenkins [Walter W. Jenkins], who was one of the chief assistants to Lyndon Johnson, was caught in a homosexual situation. It was a matter of police record, but reporters didn't know about it. But Republican aides, people involved with the Republican National Committee, leaked it to reporters. I was covering Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater] then in Arizona. Goldwater himself did not do anything about it. But he didn't have to. The story was there. Anything he said was just going to make it worse from the Republican standpoint. From the Democratic standpoint, it was there.

The Johnsons handled it well in the sense that they expressed their sympathy for Jenkins. He was disposed of as a White House aide. In those days homosexuality was considered a security risk and everything else. Today that wouldn't have been the case. Well, it would have been the case in the manner in which he was found out. This was at the YMCA in the men's room, and a police informer or a police plant--it was a police plant who was there. He had been drinking, and it was an ugly story. But the Republicans, I know the Republicans leaked it because one of them tried to leak it to me. So I know it for a fact. If they had known enough about the Kennedy escapades, they'd have done something with it.

DAITCH: I just find it hard to believe that they didn't know.

SPIVAK: So do I.

DAITCH: If it's true that it was so obvious.

SPIVAK: Well, the worst of all being the Judith Exner [Judith Campbell Exner] case.

DAITCH: Of course.

SPIVAK: But then again, who was going to make that public? Not Bob, not Sinatra [Frank A. Sinatra], and certainly not the Kennedys or Kennedy.

DAITCH: Yes. So you may have caught wind of a little here and there. But that was something that you....

SPIVAK: Not that. I had no inkling of that. Not a bit, no. You know, the stories about the two young women at the White House. I won't mention the names even though other people do. But I knew one of them. I dated one of them.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: Yes. I don't know whether anything was going on or whether they were just there for fun and games. That could have been, too. Who knew? I could go into a few episodes. I just don't like to do that. But we couldn't have cared less! That's the main thing. We not only didn't care, but in my attitude, we should not have cared.

DAITCH: It wasn't a big thing. I think the only case in which it would, again, be a problem, and this is what Dallek discussed, is if it affected the presidency in some way.

SPIVAK: Exactly, exactly. And it didn't.

DAITCH: Not that anybody's been able to....

SPIVAK: It might have improved the presidency. Who knew? Well, I think that's....

DAITCH: If he was a happy guy.... [Laughter]

SPIVAK: No, I mean seriously. Now, whether he was faithful to his wife, that's none of our business.

DAITCH: No. I do think.... I mean of course this is from a woman's point of view, I find it distasteful. But that's between her and him.

SPIVAK: Yes, yes.

DAITCH: It's not anybody else's concern.

SPIVAK: Yes. And I regret that so much has been made of it. I regret that Dallek made so much of it, and I'm surprised he did. But he made less of it than some other books have done that have already been printed.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. And again, I think that he was trying to ask a legitimate question in terms of did it affect the presidency? And in order to ask the question, you have to bring up the circumstance. And he asked the same question about his health, which was even more of an issue.

SPIVAK: Oh, when this latest episode, the one that's in Dallek's book, came out, I had phone calls from about five different directions, or six different directions.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: Reporters. How they got my name, I don't know. But I'm one of the few survivors. There aren't that many people left who covered the White House full time. This is 40 years since then, and I was relatively young then. There weren't too many people there younger than I was.

DAITCH: Yes. I would think it would be a big coup to be a White House correspondent.

SPIVAK: It was. Well, to me it was. To me it was. Some people are rather blase about it. But I wasn't. But in any event, I got these calls: Did I know anything about this woman Mimi? Well, first, we didn't know the name. Then the name came out. And the answer was, I knew about the situation. Did I suspect...? I knew who she was. And whatever. And I said, "I had my suspicions about that, but so what?" I didn't write about it at the time because I didn't have any evidence of anything. And if I had had, we wouldn't have carried the story anyway because it just wasn't done.

DAITCH: That's just interesting that it wasn't, you know, that's not news, but it's news that somebody's building a nursery. I don't know. None of those things are....

SPIVAK: The news is they denied it. That's always the story. That's always the story. It would have been just a little squib. It would have been about a three-paragraph story.

DAITCH: That nobody would have even noticed.

SPIVAK: But then it became a contest. I mean Pierre fed that, innocently, but he fed that. Poor Pierre. He got into so many messes. Fifty-mile hikes. I don't know if you heard anything about that. But they had this "vigor," they had this physical fitness program, that people should take 50-mile hikes. And so Pierre--we used to call him

“pudgy,” which he was at that time. I don’t know if he stayed pudgy or not. Poor fellow, he’s very ill now. I heard he has Alzheimer’s. He’s in France. In any event, Pierre attempted the 50-mile hike, and I don’t know if he got more than 50 feet.

Then another time, a drink milk campaign. I showed you a picture of that, where he’s drinking a glass of milk with a bunch of reporters also drinking it. And it’s the first time any of us had a glass of milk. [ASIDE CONVERSATION RE RECORDING MACHINE] As a matter of fact, we called him “plucky Pierre” sometimes.

DAITCH: Plucky Pierre?

SPIVAK: A takeoff on the word “Lucky Pierre.”

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

DAITCH: Anyway, one of the things I was going to ask you is just what, in terms of your everyday stuff at the White House.... We’ve talked about some of the exciting or fun or interesting moments about chasing the president out on the *Honey Chile* and stuff like that.

SPIVAK: Off beat.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. But what would be sort of a typical day at the White House?

SPIVAK: Let me.... I’ll have to go back a little bit to answer. I started covering the White House with Eisenhower.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: Yes. Two times. The first time when he had his heart attack in 1955. That was just for about three months. I was helping out on that out in Denver where he was, and then in Gettysburg when he was recovering. And then in and out of the White House. I’d be in and out on maybe weekends to relieve our--remember I was at INS--relieve our regular White House reporter. I actually started with Truman for two weeks in 1952, part of his final weeks in office.

DAITCH: Wow, you would have been a puppy. But you were on Capitol Hill. I mean you were supposed to be covering....

SPIVAK: That was my basic assignment.

DAITCH: Okay.

SPIVAK: But they just pulled me off for two weeks there. But it was an easy two weeks of covering. I mean I didn't really cover Truman. I was just there. But in terms of Eisenhower, yes, I covered the White House in 1955 for several months. But then went back to covering the Senate; I basically covered the Senate. But then in 1957, toward the end of '57, INS's regular White House reporter resigned very suddenly, and I was assigned to replace him very suddenly. This was December of '57. The first assignment was to go to Paris with Eisenhower for a NATO summit meeting.

DAITCH: Really! Wow!

SPIVAK: So that was easy to take. Tough work, but easy to take. I stayed then until INS was swallowed up by UP in May of 1958. So that was a half year roughly. And in Eisenhower's time, Jim Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] was the press secretary, a very, very efficient--probably the best press secretary who ever existed. The Eisenhower Administration was a very calm one. They had their crises: the Francis Gary Powers U-2 thing, Sputnik. They had all kinds of crises. But you didn't have the pandemonium in those days that you have today.

Of course today you have pandemonium with 24/7 cable coverage, and the networks screaming the way they do on their half-hour broadcasts. Then they had 15-minute broadcasts. On and on and on. All these differences. A very limited number of reporters covering the White House. And since you didn't have television having matured the way it has now.... Yes, you had movie cameras for newsreels for covering the White House. But you didn't have these huge crews of cameramen, sound men, producers that you have today.

So the word I would use is "manageable." It was manageable for the reporters, manageable for the White House and its staff. Certainly manageable for the president. And Eisenhower had a lot of press conferences, which there's no need getting into. It wasn't until Kennedy came and they were televised and everything was on the record. In Eisenhower's case it wasn't on the record 'til they approved the transcript. In Truman's case they would only put certain things on the record. Other things had to be paraphrased.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: And on and on and on. I forget what the rules were in Roosevelt's time, which was before my time. I was alive, but rather young. [Chuckles]

DAITCH: Not reporting.

SPIVAK: Yes. So in any event, each wire service, and I'll speak from a wire service standpoint, but even newspapers or networks, each just had one person covering the White House. Oh, that person would be relieved every now and

then or if something special was coming up, then he'd have extra help or something.

Then Kennedy came in. Young wife, young child. Also a more vibrant person with more vibrant people around him than in the Eisenhower period. So the AP and UP, UPI, that is, both assigned two people to the White House. So I went back to the White House at that time with Merriman, who was my former competitor, now as my senior partner. The AP had--oh, golly, who did they have? Well, it doesn't matter. That was the competition.

In the Eisenhower days, when the press office would say there's a "lid," a lid meant nothing's going to happen, or nothing's going to be announced. Let's say it's noon, they would say there's a lid 'til one o'clock. You're safe to go out and have lunch. In the Kennedy period, they would say there was a lid, but we didn't believe them or trust them. One person stayed behind. We always had somebody there because Pierre, a delightful person, was a very slipshod person.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

SPIVAK: Yes. And his staff, delightful people, but weren't sort of the disciplined types that we had gotten to know under the Eisenhower Administration. We weren't complaining. We liked them. We were very happy. Everything was fine. We all got along well. One of my dearest friends at the time was Chris Camp [Christine Camp], who was Pierre's No. 1 secretary. In years since then, one of my very good friends has been Sue Vogelsinger [Sue M. Vogelsinger]; she was then Sue Mortenson and she was sort of No. 2 to Chris. So there was a good relationship, a very good relationship. But we just wanted to make sure that this slipshod way things could be handled, not necessarily always were, but could be handled, we always were on our guard.

So we would get in there about nine o'clock or so, and I guess we would stay 'til we got the lid at five or six or seven or whatever the time might be. A full-time White House reporter is pretty well stymied in what he can cover. By full time, I'm talking about a wire service guy who lives there not round the clock but round the working-day clock. You're there in the press room or you're in the lobby or in the press office waiting for an announcement to be made, or you might get a query about something from your clients or from your news desk. Or, let's say the king of England has died. You go in and say, "Pierre, what does the president have to say about the king?" Or, what about this nursery at Otis Air Force Base? Or this, that, or the other thing?

So you're busy. You have things to do. But it's not like covering the Hill where you go off and interview individual senators all the time. And for the work-a-day reporter, we didn't really have that much interchange with the staff. I'm talking about your Sorensen or Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] or I could name a million of them. Well, I couldn't name a million of them. I could then, but I can't now. But the ones who were there.

DAITCH: So there's no just sort of walking down the hall and seeing who might be in their office and have a chat.

SPIVAK: You can't walk down the hall. There's an armed policeman or a White House

guard there. They won't let you go past that door. And, no, you definitely can't. You had to be escorted wherever you went.

DAITCH: I see. Because I had heard that was a less formal White House or fairly informal White House as far as that goes. But there was still security, I guess.

SPIVAK: Very, very much so. You didn't just go walk down the hall. There was no hall to walk down for us. You had your limited area. Now, you could ask permission to visit someone if you had an appointment with somebody. He could say, "Well, come to my office." In that case you'd be escorted to his office. It happened every now and then. But by and large we wire service people didn't do much; or we could do it by telephone.

Now, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, various others, with all that time they had and also their prestige.... I told you, we were the infantry; we were the grunts. But Bill Lawrence of the *New York Times*, he could pick up his phone, call Ted Sorensen, and say, "Ted, I'd like to come and talk to you about the background of why this speech was done" whatever, whatever.... And he'd get the appointment. Or he'd take him to lunch. We didn't have the expense accounts they had to take people to lunch. In those days the government officials weren't restricted like they might be today about expense account acceptance or whatever.

I'm trying to think of how else to describe it. Yes, we'd get background information on events, but it would be what they wanted us to get. Let's say the president sent a message to Congress, and someone would come and brief us on background, meaning: Don't quote me. Non-attributable basis, but you can use the information. So when you read in the paper White House sources said that the speech was based on the following, because it's not in the speech, that's how it happens.

So that's the way it was done. Now, on trips things were a bit different because there you would likely be in the same hotel where the staff was. You'd meet them in the bar, have drinks with them, chat. Sometimes it could lead to an "on the record" story. Usually not. But at least you were building up a relationship. But it was on those trips. Those trips were very valuable to a White House reporter, of which, I must emphasize, there were far fewer at that time. Blessedly far fewer at that time.

I remember in Palm Beach we stayed at the Palm Beach Towers Hotel with a swimming pool. We would all sit around the pool when nothing was happening. Sometimes Pierre was there dictating to Sue or to Chris while he was chatting with us about something. But we got along well. It was pleasant. We also got along with the Secret Service. Now, I'm speaking specifically of the Kennedy days and the Eisenhower days. That's all I can speak for, really. Go on a trip, we would have drinks with the Secret Service men.

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: We'd go out to dinner with them. We had great relationships. Then the assassination came. At that point that relationship between the press and the

Secret Service died. It's unfortunate. But one reason was that some of the agents were accused of having been out the night before drinking. I don't know if it was with press or wasn't with press. But it could have been. And these guys were dedicated. They were devoted to their jobs.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

SPIVAK: They didn't go and get blind drunk or anything and screw up their jobs that way. But that relationship changed during the Johnson days. During the Johnson time the situation was pretty much the same in terms of White House coverage, except that Pierre started there right after the assassination, but he didn't stay very long. He left, and he ran for the Senate from California. He was appointed, I think, to fill out the term. I forget who it was that had died or left. I forget the circumstances. Then he ran, and he lost. Johnson campaigned for him, too, when he ran. He campaigned hard for him. I think he basically liked Pierre.

Johnson kept the Kennedy staffers to the extent he could. He didn't want them to leave because he wanted to show the continuity between the two White Houses. There were some staffers he didn't like that he kept. I doubt that he liked Richard Goodwin very much, but he used Richard Goodwin to good effect in terms of the Great Society speeches and various other things. But I don't think Goodwin liked Johnson or was very happy there either. He left at some point. I don't know if Sorensen stayed for any period of time or not. I'm sure Johnson wanted him to. There was no chemistry there. There was no chemistry with Kenny O'Donnell, who was, of course, close to Bob Kennedy, very close to Bob Kennedy.

Then, of course, the Vietnam situation kept worsening and worsening and worsening, so that Johnson really became a prisoner in the White House. I use that lightly, broadly. But he didn't make very many trips at a certain point. For me, personally, I just became bored covering the place. I asked to be reassigned. They didn't reassign me.

Then in 1967 after the urban riots in Detroit and Newark and various other places, I had become very friendly with the assistant press secretary, Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston]. He was a neighbor of mine in Alexandria. We used to drive to work together. And George Christian [George E. Christian], who was then the press secretary, whom we liked very much, we had a good relationship with him, as opposed to George Reedy [George E. Reedy, Jr.], poor fellow. He just was ineffective as a press secretary. A wonderful person. I knew him back when he worked with Johnson in the Senate in the Democratic Policy Committee. And I knew him very well as a drinking buddy at the Press Club. But he was ineffectual as a press secretary.

Moyers [William D. Moyers] came along, and we got along well. But a different chemistry, again. I won't say anything bad about Moyers. There was nothing wrong. But the chemistry wasn't quite there, at least not for me. Then Christian came, and there was very good chemistry. But the place to me was becoming a drag. When the riots occurred, Johnson appointed a commission headed by Otto Kerner [Otto Kerner, Jr.], who was then the governor of Illinois; it became known as the Kerner Commission, to study and investigate the riots. Christian asked me if I could get a leave-of-absence to become, at Tom Johnson's

recommendation he asked if I could get a leave-of-absence to be the press information director for the Kerner Commission. And I did.

DAITCH: Oh, that's nice.

SPIVAK: That was August of '67, and I never went back to news work after that. The leave-of-absence expired. Johnson tried to hire me at the White House. As I was about ready to say yes, this was March of '68, Johnson announced he wasn't going to run again. And I was going to be hired to work in the campaign. Which was something I had longed to do having covered campaigns since 1952. I wanted to work in one. But I wasn't going to work in one where the man says he's not running.

So I had gotten to know Senator Fred Harris [Fred Roy Harris], who was on the Kerner Commission, from Oklahoma. He became co-chairman of Humphrey's campaign committee to get the nomination. He asked me if I would go to work in that, and I did. Humphrey was running against Bob Kennedy. And as much as I had liked Bob Kennedy, I was not keen on him becoming the presidential candidate.

DAITCH: Oh, really! Why not?

SPIVAK: Two reasons, one of which is--and, of course, I had never up to that point worked for a political party, but I still had a loyalist vein going through me, and I felt that a person should not run against his own party's president. No. 2, he was running against the Vietnam War. And while we didn't know then what we know now, based on those tapes that were released, I was convinced that he was very much for the Vietnam War and instrumental in decisions that were made. Now, really, by the time John Kennedy died, we weren't in Vietnam like we eventually got to be when Johnson was president. But the seed was planted. And I did not think, it didn't agree with what I gather Dallek has said: that if John Kennedy were reelected, he would have pulled out. I don't think he would have. He wasn't a pulling out kind of guy.

So that's the story, I guess, the best I can tell about what it was like to cover the White House. I don't know what more I could add unless you have any specifics.

DAITCH: I wondered about some of the people.... Basically what you're telling me is it wasn't all that exciting when you were at the White House. It was more fun when you were traveling?

SPIVAK: There were days it was, days it wasn't. During the Cuba Missile Crisis, I guarantee you it was exciting. But there were lots of days it was. Even in town something could happen, that would be very exciting. But travel was where you got to know people better. There was less news, but you piled up your relationships in terms of the future. Example: I was able to develop a relationship with Larry O'Brien, so that even if I was traveling, I could call him back in Washington and, much to Pierre's dismay, get a good story for the next day, with a Palm Beach dateline on it even though I got my

information from Washington. And it drove Pierre crazy. Because he was afraid the president would think he gave it out. It wasn't a nice thing to do. But I did it anyway.

DAITCH: Well, you're a reporter. That's your job. Tell me about some of the other people that you did get to know a little bit: Larry O'Brien and maybe Kenny O'Donnell.

SPIVAK: Well, I eventually went to work for Larry O'Brien at the Democratic National Committee. But I got to know Larry pretty well. I knew Kenny O'Donnell back from the days that he worked for Bob Kennedy on the Hill for the Labor Rackets Investigation. That's where I first met Pierre. Because Bob Kennedy hired Kenny, who had been a friend of Jack Kennedy. I gather they went to school together, if I'm not mistaken. I'm not sure. Remember it's 40 years ago. But he hired Pierre. I don't know what his relationship with Pierre was, but he hired Pierre as an investigator. But Pierre had been a writer for *Look Magazine* and for various other publications. So I got to know those three. Well, I got to know Bobby, of course; but Pierre and Kenny, both pretty well at that time.

Other staffers: Mike Feldman, I got to know him well. And Ted Sorensen by virtue of traveling on *Air Force One* with them as a pool reporter. Goodwin, no. We knew each other in passing, but not well. Lee White [Lee C. White] I got to know reasonably well. He did a lot on the civil rights front, although it was Burke Marshall who really did it. I didn't know Burke Marshall. I got to know the White House doctors very well, starting with the Eisenhower days, and then Kennedy, and then Johnson's time.

DAITCH: How was that?

SPIVAK: We just were able to hit it off, that was all. And they were nice because, you know, we were traveling together. If we had a little problem, they'd give us a pill, too. I'm trying to think of who else. Dr. Travell, I talked to her a couple of times; I didn't know her. She stayed rather aloof. Whereas George Burkley, who was an admiral, a three-star admiral, he was very easy to get along with. In contrast to the three-star general who was Eisenhower's doctor, Dr. Howard Snyder [Howard McCrum Snyder]. The pilots of the plane, we got to know them pretty well.

DAITCH: Oh, is that right?

SPIVAK: The pilots of *Air Force One*. Always a nice guy, always a real professional. And we got to know the crew on the airplanes. Of course, my favorite crew story has nothing to do with Kennedy, it's Johnson. But he was flying some place or another, and he called the steward over and said, "I want some Diet Dr. Pepper." And the steward said, "I'm sorry, Mr. President, we don't have any Diet Dr. Pepper." And he said, "Hereafter, alert all stations..." These are actual words. "...alert all stations. From now on you are going to have Diet Dr. Pepper on this airplane whenever I travel." Well, that steward quit the Air Force a month later. He decided he couldn't take it anymore.

DAITCH: It was too much. “Alert all stations.” [Laughter]

SPIVAK: That’s something John Kennedy never would have done, never in a million years. But the same steward had been on the Kennedy plane, of course, too. Other people? Well, Evelyn Lincoln, the secretary, I got to know her very well. Nice lady. Pam Turnure [Pamela Turnure] and, oh, golly. Well, there was a stewardess who was aboard *Caroline*, Janet Des Rosiers. And on and on, I just can’t think of the others.

DAITCH: Did you have any, among the staff, any particular favorites, people that you really enjoyed?

SPIVAK: Well, certainly Pierre Salinger. Now, he had a deputy, Andy Hatcher, Andrew T. Hatcher; I’ll never forget that. During the campaign Salinger every now and then would disappear off on his own venture, whatever it was, and Hatcher would come to our rescue. Hatcher was, as we say in today’s terminology, African-American, which was unusual then to have in a high staff position. Very capable at the time, we felt, and very helpful. After the inauguration, the tables turned. Hatcher became the one unavailable, and Salinger was the one who came to our rescue. And there were a few others who worked there. A fellow named Malcolm Kilduff [Malcolm M. Kilduff] was another press assistant. Dave Waters they drafted from the State Department Protocol Office. He’d worked for Angier Biddle Duke there. And he was quite nice.

I liked Kenny O’Donnell very much, very, very nice person. I liked Larry immensely, Larry O’Brien. Mike Feldman. There was no one I disliked. But you say, who did I like? Those are the ones that come to mind.

DAITCH: Yes. I’ve actually, I’ve heard very nice things.... But again, you’re not sure whether people are just sort of seeing the era with rose-colored glasses.

SPIVAK: Oh, Ted Clifton [Chester V. “Ted” Clifton], the military man, I liked him very much. And the Naval aide, Commander Tazewell Shepard [Tazewell T. Shepard, Jr.], I liked him. I sort of tolerated Godfrey McHugh, but I didn’t like him very much.

DAITCH: It seems to me that it would be unusual to have all these sort of high-powered people together and everybody works well together. Because I ask people this question, who did you especially like, or were there people that you really had trouble working with? Generally it seems to have been a pretty agreeable atmosphere.

SPIVAK: Yes, I would say that. We’re speaking specifically of the Kennedy White House, and I don’t remember having trouble working with anyone. Now, I didn’t have the access that a lot of other reporters had. I’m talking here of the nobility, the major newspapers and their major correspondents with major amounts of time to

cultivate people and to handle stories and to do them well. I don't say that out of any bitterness or resentment. It's just my role was different.

I had the work-a-day role covering the breaking news as it happened. Every now and then do an analytical story when a milestone was reached: The president's been in office six months; do a long analysis of what has happened. And I would. I was capable of it. If I hadn't been, they'd have thrown me off the job. But I think by and large we got along well together. There were exceptions, or at least some people just hid their feelings, I guess.

Now, I know that wasn't the case on the distaff side of the White House where Jackie Kennedy very openly disliked some of the women reporters. She disliked Helen Thomas's competitor Frances Lewine; Pierre told me that. He said that she didn't dislike Helen that much; she just disliked Helen's stories and the fact that Helen was covering the family side so intensely, including the famous story that Pierre has told many times and wrote about in his book, where in the middle of the night she called him, called Pierre, and said, "Is it true that Caroline's hamster has died?" Did Helen mention that to you?

DAITCH: Yes.

SPIVAK: Pierre said, well anyway....

DAITCH: That's cute. But, yes, you know, you can see why she would have felt put upon to have these people covering her. But at the same time....

SPIVAK: I didn't blame her. Now the women did blame her. They were offended by it. But Mamie Eisenhower [Mamie Geneva Doud Eisenhower] didn't treat them any better. But they weren't around with Mamie Eisenhower. Mamie Eisenhower had a much more private existence, but Mamie wasn't a young woman with a young child. There was a difference. And there were times when.... There was one time Mamie Eisenhower was going off to a health ranch or beauty ranch or something, and the president made his airplane available to take her there. The press covering Eisenhower in Colorado at the time, I was there, made a big issue of that. I didn't. I was really mousy about it. I was a timid little fellow; I was new to the job. I didn't know.

But some of the old-timers, including a fellow from the *Chicago Tribune*, which at that time was a rabid Republican newspaper, their reporter--now it's a rabid Democratic one apparently--but anyway, their reporter made a big issue of it, and various others. I went along in terms of what I was writing. I didn't ask him questions about it. I couldn't have cared less whose airplane Mamie used to go to the beauty parlor. But that infuriated Eisenhower. It must have infuriated Mrs. Eisenhower; I would have to assume so. But I didn't blame Jackie a bit.

DAITCH: It would be hard to have someone sort of watching you all the time.

SPIVAK: Yes.

DAITCH: But, you know, also it probably made bad matters worse that she was fairly hostile, like openly hostile toward them.

SPIVAK: Yes. I mean Hillary Clinton [Hillary Rodham Clinton] in her book--I haven't opened that book either, but I raced out to get it--but I gather she kind of indicates, well, it all went with the territory. Nonsense. You're human beings, you have your feelings when people are invading your privacy. Or, more or less offending your privacy.

DAITCH: Right. Well, at least Hillary Clinton is a political animal herself. I mean she's a very, very political woman. She's very astute about politics, and Jackie never wanted to be.

SPIVAK: She's a professional woman, a lawyer. Jackie was not. She kind of grew up much tougher than Jackie did. But Jackie was an inquiring reporter for the *Washington Times Herald*. So she had her journalistic background. She would ask people embarrassing questions. But still and all, I personally didn't blame her. The women reporters, I know, were very put out by it.

DAITCH: We were talking about other people in the White House, you know, particular friends or that sort of thing. I don't know if this is a fair question, if you have any knowledge of this, but just from being around the White House and being around when the president was traveling, did you get any feel for who his personal favorites were, like his closer friends among the staff or that kind of thing?

SPIVAK: Oh, on many trips he would have some close personal friends, like LeMoyne Billings [Kirk LeMoyne "Lem" Billings] traveling with him. God, I saw nothing that would link those two people together. LeMoyne Billings did not seem of the intellectual stature that John Kennedy was. I'm being kind in the way I say that. And there might have been one other who came along just as a personal friend.

Did he have any favorites among the staff? I have no way of.... I'm sure he had. He had to have had. I'm sure he liked Pierre even though he'd be furious with Pierre over various things, but he was smart enough to know it wasn't Pierre's fault. Pierre didn't slip up too often in what he said. Basically he was telling us what he was told to say. And Pierre did a masterful job of handling the press during the missile crisis. But again, he was being told what he needed to be told in order to do it. That's a press secretary's problem. He can only.... Well, as I learned when I went into public relations, it's a spokesman's problem; a spokesman can only tell what he's authorized to say or what he's told are the facts.

Now, I'm sure Kennedy was very fond of and beholden to Ted Sorensen. God, he had to be. And Kenny O'Donnell, there was a personal relationship. Dave Powers [David F. Powers] definitely, they went back together the way they did. There are some I can't believe he really was very fond of.

DAITCH: Yes? Like who?

SPIVAK: They just weren't his kind of person in my mind. Well, I can't picture his having any great personal fondness for Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], although I can conceive of him having a great professional respect for him. But I can't see any more there. I'm guessing. This is all guess work. Who else? I don't know why I picked his name out of the hat. I'm sure there were others. He had to have liked Larry O'Brien, because how could you not. The Boston Mafia, he used that term, I'm sure he liked them all personally. Others who came in later he must have had some mixed feelings here and there, but we would never have known.

DAITCH: Right. Yes, the Boston Mafia guys seem to be the ones that came all the way through with him, through the various campaigns, they were friends from way back. That's just a different kettle of fish than pulling in advisors who are experts in their fields.

SPIVAK: Exactly. For example, you look at the Cabinet or sub-Cabinet or whatever, I'm sure he didn't like Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]. The reason I'm sure of that is I just read it last night going through one of the books I was going into to bone up on this, something I wanted to bone up on in terms of your coming here today. I assume that he liked Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] professionally. But I don't see how anybody could have warmed up to Bob McNamara in any way. I don't know anything about McGeorge Bundy. There must have been a good kinship between them. Dean Rusk [David Dean Rusk] I don't know. And there were some others. There was one I can't remember the name of the person. He was sort of not openly contemptuous, but he very clearly didn't like him, but I can't remember who it was. I'm sorry about that. Maybe I'm glad about that.

DAITCH: Yes.

SPIVAK: But I just don't remember.

DAITCH: I had heard, too, that he just wasn't, he was too professional to.... I mean he might get mad or something, but he was too professional to be openly rude or contemptuous about somebody.

SPIVAK: Yes, too well bred, too.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: But there's no question, because I mentioned this earlier, no question that he didn't like the joint chiefs after the Bay of Pigs. Now, when he put his own people in there. I guess he liked them. I don't know. I didn't hear otherwise.

But he must not have liked Allen Dulles too much. I can't believe he liked J. Edgar Hoover very much. To me it wouldn't have been personalities meshing.

DAITCH: But again, who would? [Laughter]

SPIVAK: Well, if he'd only known how much J. Edgar Hoover had on him later on, which later came out, of course, had on everybody else.

DAITCH: I want to talk about what's on your list because I'm curious about what you were thinking about.

SPIVAK: Well, it's anecdotal. Just things that came to mind in my stream of consciousness. On the Cuban Missile Crisis, you know, that all began the diplomatic--what do we call it, the diplomatic lie?--when Kennedy suddenly came back to town saying he had a cold, and he didn't have a cold. But it was because they got.... There had been all kinds of stories going around about missiles in Cuba. Senator Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] of New York was one who was spreading it. And I was quite familiar with that because a young woman I was dating was someone he was chasing.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

SPIVAK: I say these things when people are dead. I don't care what I say about someone who's dead.

DAITCH: And it just goes to show you how people learn things in a small town.

SPIVAK: But Keating was in the paper day after day making these accusations. But, as it turned out, he was making accusations about the wrong missiles and the wrong kinds of missiles. So they got better intelligence about all this. At the beginning, you know, it just sort of grew. We didn't know how serious it was. Day by day this thing.... We knew how serious it was when Pierre was staying downtown in a hotel and not going home, and we were on constant call.

So again, being anecdotal, I remember one evening--remember I was a bachelor at the time, so I spent a lot of my free time at the Press Club which had probably the best bar in Washington. In those days it was not a good drinking town. It is today. So I was at the Press Club bar, and two reporters for *TASS*, the Soviet news agency approached me, one of whom covered the White House, the other one I didn't know; I think his name was Vassilly, but I'm not sure. He said, "Can we buy you a drink, Mr. Spivak?" I said, "Well, sure. You can buy me a drink." He said, "Well, can we sit down and chat?" I said, "Well, sure, sure." Because by that time I had probably had a few anyway.

DAITCH: And, well, you're buying me a drink, you can chat.

SPIVAK: So I sat down at a table with them. They said, “You know, we are very interested in what is going on at the White House right now about Cuba, the missiles.” I said, “Oh!” Let’s assume his name was Vassilly. I said, “Well, Vassilly, you’re there the same as I am. You know what’s going on.” “Well, maybe you know more than we do. What can you tell us about it?” Well, the fact is I didn’t know any more than they did. But I looked them squarely in the eye and said, “I don’t have any details, but I want you to know they’re serious.” Well, that was about three martinis talking, I suppose, or maybe more. But I was right.

DAITCH: Yes, as it turns out.

SPIVAK: And I’m sure that that did not contribute to the flow of knowledge at the Kremlin, but I earned my martini. Yes, those were tense days. Even the press was under some tension on that. But it’s interesting that after that, I didn’t have this written down, it just comes to mind--again, the stream of consciousness--suddenly one day the regular reporters covering the White House.... Let’s say regular, if you extended it, could be about 25, 30 people at most. That was how many. They said, We’d like you all to assemble here at the White House at X hour, let’s say seven p.m. Which we did. And they piled us into helicopters; or they piled us into a bus and took us to probably Bolling Air Force Base across the Anacostia River. And then put us into helicopters. We said, “Where the hell are we going?” They said, “We can’t tell you.”

Well, we shrugged and said, okay. We knew we were in good hands. Well, they took us to what was simply known as a secret place, a cave. We didn’t know where it was, a mountain someplace, near Washington. It was an hour’s flight in a helicopter or less. Gigantic concrete, reinforced concrete sliding doors. Right out of *Dr. Strangelove*. And they took us in there to a room that was like *Dr. Strangelove*. You’ve seen the movie, I assume.

DAITCH: Yes.

SPIVAK: There we are, and what are we doing here? And the man giving the briefing started out by saying, “You’re not aware of it, but all of you have been given very quick security background checks, and we are going to give you some information now that is secret. The mere fact that you’re here is secret. The location is secret.” We said, “We don’t even know the location.” He said, “Well, I’m going to tell you the location, but you have to agree that anything said in this room stays secret. If you divulge it, you have violated the Espionage Act.”

DAITCH: Wow! So why did they bring you there?

SPIVAK: So these are a bunch of reporters. We’re a bunch of reporters. So somebody said, “Why are we here?” The answer was: Because this is one of the places that government officials would come in the event of a nuclear emergency because this is protected against radiation, against blast. This is one. This is not the

presidential retreat. It's the Congressional retreat and some of the executive branch, too. They said, "The reason you're here is that one of the flaws we found during..." I'm sorry, this wasn't Bay of Pigs. This was after the missile crisis. Did I say Bay of Pigs? This was after the missile crisis.

DAITCH: Well, I heard missile crisis, so I don't know if that's what you said.

SPIVAK: And they said, "The reason you're here is that we discovered that in the event of an emergency we'd have all of the government officials protected and in a secret place with no means of communicating with the outside. We need the press here to communicate.

DAITCH: Oh, wow!

SPIVAK: They discovered that, which was brilliant.

DAITCH: Yes, it's a good thing they thought of it. Not that they needed it.

SPIVAK: Thank God we didn't need it. So all of us had to agree in writing we would agree to the secrecy. And they told us where we were, how to get there. They said, "You would be notified to come to this place. You might not be told why, but you'd be notified to come to the place. And you had to be ready at a moment's notice to come when you're notified. You are the only people, you're the ones who know where it is and how to get here." And it was within an hour's drive, I should say, of Washington. So somebody said, "Well, what about our families?" They said, "Sorry about that. No families. Just you." They said, "Does that apply to the government officials?" The answer was, yes. No families, just you.

Can you believe that when we got back to Washington, one reporter, and he will remain nameless, went up to the Press Club bar and got drunk and told some other reporters about it. Nothing ever came of it. But that guy was shunned by his colleagues for months.

DAITCH: I'll bet.

SPIVAK: It went away. Of course no harm came of it. Later on, an airplane crashed at the mountain where this was located. When I say later on, I'm talking about years later, an airplane crashed. And it became known that there was a secret hideaway there for government officials. I was no longer covering the White House. I was then working in the defense industry, where I was subject to security restrictions of my own.

Several reporters, one from *Time Magazine*, one from various others, called me, it was a White House staffer who gave them my name, and said, "We understand you know about this. What can you tell us about it?" And I said, "Nothing." They said, "Can you tell us if this is the place?" I said, "No." "Can you tell us anything?" I said, "No." They said, "Well, it's known that it is." I said, "In that case, why are you calling me?" And so to this moment

I've never given out any details of it. First of all, I couldn't remember any details of the location. I couldn't find it today if I tried to. But that's how it became known publicly at that time. That there it was.

DAITCH: Now, is it still active in terms of...?

SPIVAK: I have no idea.

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

[BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 3]

DAITCH: I'll just pick up by saying we were talking about the president's erudition.

SPIVAK: Well, yes, historical erudition and literary erudition. I remember aboard the *Caroline* one time, I'd just gotten to somewhat know him, and he was reading a book. And I figured, I wonder what that is? I figure it has to be politics or something. It was Emerson [Ralph Waldo Emerson].

DAITCH: Really!

SPIVAK: Yes, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

DAITCH: That's interesting.

SPIVAK: That's more than I've ever done. [Chuckles]

DAITCH: Right. You know, I had my few days of it in school or whatever, but....

SPIVAK: The other story I marked down to tell you was about the president sending troops to the University of Mississippi. And what I noticed on the Web today was the Library has a big exhibit about him helping in the integration of the University of Mississippi. This was when James Meredith [James Howard Meredith] wanted to attend. Dallek's book didn't mention it.

DAITCH: That's weird. I hadn't noticed that about the book.

SPIVAK: The reason I went to look it up was I was trying to remember, because there was an episode involved, and I was trying to remember, was it the University of Mississippi or Alabama where he sent troops in? Now Eisenhower sent troops to Little Rock to integrate a high school.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: I wasn't covering Ike then, I was covering the Senate, but it was vivid in my memory. And this was Kennedy, and I'm sure it was vivid in Kennedy's memory. Kennedy was so concerned about not losing the South or at least about trying to gain the South, well, regain the South. Johnson brought some of the South in during the '60 election. But he was so concerned about the South that he didn't want to send troops in to Mississippi. But the time came when he just had to do something.

It was a Saturday night, very late on a Saturday night. I boned up on this, reading Sorensen's book, and Sorensen said this all happened on a Sunday. Well, essentially it did. But I remember that on a Saturday we knew something could be happening. Pierre was somewhere, I don't know where. But Andy Hatcher was holding the fort at the White House. And he told a couple of us, the wire service people, better stand by, not at the White House, but be on call in case anything happens. Well, we knew what that meant: In case anything happens regarding the University of Mississippi, whether it was troops, or whatever it was going to be.

Well, I suddenly that day had developed a terrible, terrible toothache. I don't remember what it was. But I was in agony. But I stayed in our office downtown, the UPI office, which was in the National Press Building. Now, geographically, that's 14th Street and F. I'd better make sure my memory's right. I haven't lived in Washington for three years now. But 14th and F. The White House is at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. It's a long walk, but not that long.

But I was in the office just doodling around doing things. Probably writing letters. I don't know what I was doing there. And very late that night, maybe ten o'clock or so, the phone rang, it was Andy Hatcher saying, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm in my office." He said, "Well, get here right away. We're going to have something." I said, "Okay." Well, I walked out the door. The minute I hit the elevator button, an elevator arrived. Went down the seven floors or whatever they were to the ground floor. Walked out the door. A taxi arrived immediately. Popped in. Said, "Take me to the White House." Taxi driver took us. We made every light. And I was at the White House within about five minutes.

As I arrived, I went into Hatcher's office, and he was on the telephone reading a statement with regard to troops going into Mississippi. And I went over and put my hand, cupped my hand over his mouthpiece, and said, "Who are you talking to?" He said, "I'm talking to Whitney Shoemaker or the Associated Press. He's at home." I said, "He's my competitor, and you're giving him the story at home by telephone, while I'm rushing over here from my office. Are you crazy?" He said, "Well, what's the problem? You're here. You're getting it at the same time." I said, "I'm not getting it at the same time. I don't know what you've just told him. Now start over again." [Laughter]

That's how Andy started over again, and I took notes while he talked. It wasn't a long statement, just something to the effect that the president had determined that it was necessary to have troops on call or whatever. I think that's what he was doing: having them stationed in position, positioning them, or staging them, whatever the word would be. We were used to

having conference calls from the White House. You didn't tell one person to come in physically and telephone another at home. You would give them both the story at the same time on the telephone. That's what White House phone operators are for, to set up conference calls.

I went right to the direct-line telephone we had and phoned in my story. And then went in to kill Andy Hatcher. [Laughter] He probably knew I was coming because he left.... He was gone from his office. And I got back out to the White House lobby, I had my notebook in my hand, and General Clifton, Ted Clifton, the military aide, of necessity was there. They're talking about troops. And he came and he said, "Al, is there anything I can do to help you?" I threw my notebook across the White House lobby. There was no one else there, just the two of us. And he said, "What's going on here?" He'd never seen me in a temper tantrum. I had never seen me in a temper tantrum.

DAITCH: You had a toothache. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: I also had the toothache. He said, "What is the problem?" I told him, and he said, "Oh, my God!" He said, "Well, look, let me explain the whole situation. I'll give you all the background you need about it." And he did.

DAITCH: Oh, neat. Wow.

SPIVAK: And Whitney wasn't getting that.

DAITCH: Yes, that made up for it.

SPIVAK: He was having a few martinis. It didn't make up for it. What made up for it was it was by then midnight on a Saturday night. Nobody was really going to use the story anyway. Who were you giving it to? You were tossing it into a vacuum. But the White House had gotten on record with it, which they wanted. So that's why when Sorensen said it was Sunday, he was accurate. Because by then it was midnight that this thing went out on the wire. Anyway, that was my episode with Andy Hatcher. I did not kill him. [Laughter]

DAITCH: Oh, well, that's good. I'm glad to hear that.

SPIVAK: Let's see, what's the other little thing here. As I said, it's just--I told you about the *Honey Chile* and the *Honey Fitz*. I told you about Smitty [Merriman Smith] and the sharks. Receptions, church coverage. One of my worst moments in covering Kennedy; and I'm not sure whether it was before the inauguration event. No, it must have been after he was already president, it had to be, when his father had a stroke. On a moment's notice we were told he was going to Palm Beach. Doug Cornell and I were the two reporters available, AP and UPI.

So they took us on *Air Force One* while they were mounting a press plane to take the

rest of the press down to Palm Beach. We got there, and over the course of.... We had no clothes. We had to buy clothing there on an expense account. Doug went to the expensive store, working for the AP, and I went to the cheap store, working for the UPI. [Laughter]

But one night.... I think it was St. Mary's Hospital. I think that's the name of it. One night Kennedy came to visit his father, and we were there waiting in the lobby. It was easier then to get.... If the agents knew you, you could get closer to a person. And I remember walking over to him, and I said, "How's your father coming along, Mr. President?" Poor fellow, he was looking so sad, so horribly sad, and I hated having to do that. I told you I didn't like prying into private things. He was just sort of shrugging, and he wasn't giving me an audible answer. I had to press him and ask him again, and I felt like a rat. To this day I do. He was really in great sorrow. He saw his.... You know what a person who's had a stroke can be like. And he said something that was usable, which I did for me and my story, not for him. I felt bad about it then, I feel bad about it now. It's the kind of thing you wind up doing as a reporter. I don't think I was wrong. And today you couldn't get that close to the president to do it.

DAITCH: Right, right. Which may be a good thing for certain types of things.

SPIVAK: Maybe so, yes. For that type of thing. But as for Palm Beach, we slobs of the press really got used to the lush life there. Now, we were staying at the Palm Beach Towers. That's the staff and the press were staying there. It was. It's been renamed. [ASIDE CONVERSATION] But we were staying at this reasonably lavish apartment hotel, subletting suites there, apartments.

DAITCH: Oh, yes! It was an apartment hotel.

SPIVAK: And we would have two or three of us in one because they were two- or three-bedroom places. And we complained. We complained about it. We didn't like the accommodations. Years later, after I got married, I took my wife and baby

daughter down there, and I said to Martha, "This is where we stayed in Palm Beach." I said, "Isn't it awful?" It's about two blocks from the Flagler Museum now, the big mansion where Flagler was. It's across the street virtually, not exactly, from the Breakers Hotel, the really lavish hotel there. Anyway, that was the attitude of the press.

DAITCH: No kidding!

SPIVAK: Oh, yes. We always complained.

DAITCH: I can't believe that. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: We complained about everything.

DAITCH: Yes. See, I think that would have been thrilling.

SPIVAK: What else? Oh, the other thing that happened in Palm Beach that I thought was rather amusing was.... I mentioned to you about Kennedy flying to Cape Canaveral to see the astronauts and to give medals to Shepard and Glenn. The night before, I went up to a restaurant bar with Chris Camp, the late Chris Camp, a magnificent, magnificent woman, Pierre's principal secretary. Now, what was the name of that? Martha? What's the name of that restaurant in Palm Beach?

MARTHA SPIVAK: Taboo.

SPIVAK: The Taboo, spelled T-A-B-O-O. And it was not exactly a press hangout. It was a late-night drinking place. I don't think it was a disco. It wasn't a disco, but there was music there. Chris and I stayed there 'til it closed. That was four in the morning. And there was nothing going on between Chris and me. We just liked each other's company that was all. We were just good friends. The next morning at nine a.m., or the same morning, I was there--bleary-eyed, but there. And where did we take off from? I forget. Wherever it was. Probably Palm Beach Airport; West Palm Beach Airport. It didn't look then like it looks now. And Chris didn't make it.

DAITCH: Oh, oh! I bet she was mad at you.

SPIVAK: Pierre knew we'd been out the night before, and he came over to me aboard the airplane. His words almost literally were: "Look, Spivak, I don't care what you do to your life, but leave my secretary out of it." Poor Pierre needed her, too. But when we were there on the ground at Cape Canaveral, which is now the Kennedy Space Flight Center, one of the cameramen, a fellow named Tom Craven [Thomas J. Craven, Jr.]--this guy had had experience. He had covered the *Hindenburg* disaster. You talk about people having backgrounds. He's gone now. But the president was there posing with the astronauts from the gantry from which Glenn's *Atlas* rocket had taken off. I know about *Atlases* because later on I worked for the company that made them. But Tom shouted over, "Mr. President, would you please stand over there next to the gantry!" [Laughter] It gave Kennedy the laugh that he needed.

Well, those are the things that I sort of marked down. I was up at 2:00 in the morning, and I just thought of some things last night.

DAITCH: Oh, that's really nice. What about a little more about.... I was thinking about the missile crisis. You had told me some about that. And you said the atmosphere in Washington obviously was tense.

SPIVAK: It was tense, yes.

DAITCH: But from the point of view of a journalist when you were there in the White

House, were you able to actually sort of get any handle on what was going on? Were the ExComm [Executive Committee of the National Security Council] meetings pretty private?

SPIVAK: They were very private, yes. We knew what they wanted us to know.

DAITCH: And that was...?

SPIVAK: They wanted us to know just enough to make it clear that they were serious. But they certainly didn't tell us everything that was going on, to use the expression "Who struck John." But all the nitty-gritty of who was saying what, who was attending. We knew that there was an Executive Committee. They might have told us who was on that. I don't know. I don't remember. I just don't remember. I don't remember too many details on substantive things. I just remember them on the off-beat things.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, that makes sense, though. In some ways the substantive things are part of the record, and the off-beat things, the memorable things are some of the things that I personally like to get if we can.

SPIVAK: Oh, okay.

DAITCH: So that's helpful. But any recollections of any particularly striking events are helpful, too. Oh, I know, speaking of striking events, what about the March on Washington? Were you there?

SPIVAK: No. Of course knew what was going on. See, I had mixed emotions about Kennedy on some substantive things, such as during the campaign he had said repeatedly that President Eisenhower could have solved discrimination in housing with the stroke of a pen. I remember that vividly. Because I don't know how many times I wrote that down in my notebook. But after he became president, he never stroked the pen.

It later became quite obvious, from what the historians have written, that Kennedy didn't want to antagonize the South. He needed them. He needed their votes on the Hill on other issues. Sometimes he got them, and sometimes he didn't. But he didn't want to antagonize them. And there were some awfully powerful chairmen there: Richard Russell heading the Armed Services Committee, and Kennedy was trying to beef up the armed services. And, you know, you could name all kinds of other chairmen, and you could name Lyndon Johnson who was then a Southerner. He didn't become a Westerner until he ran for president, or vice president.

So he never stroked the pen or did very much else in the civil rights field until Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] made the big issue of it and the University of Mississippi situation and then the University of Alabama. These were significant things.

These were important things. But I guess I was never a great fan of Martin Luther King, either. Don't ask me why. Maybe it's discrimination. I don't know. These are all just gut feelings. I'm no expert on King, and I'm really no expert on Kennedy. I just know what I saw, and what I saw is limited in the scheme of things. Because there are a lot of closed doors at the White House.

In terms of Martin Luther King and the March on Washington, it was obviously very effective. And it did prod Kennedy into doing more. That was definite. But he died before it could be carried out. And then Johnson implemented it, which in my mind he never could have done if we didn't have a martyred president. Now that's in my mind, but I don't think it's only in my mind.

DAITCH: No, I've heard many people say that.

SPIVAK: I think it's in the minds of smarter people than me, than I.

DAITCH: Right. You're a journalist. [Laughter] Yes, I've heard that before, too. But the alternative argument is that the time was right anyway. It was going to happen with or without a martyred president, with or without Johnson.

SPIVAK: I don't think it would have without the martyred president. I really do not think so. Then later, I told you I worked for the Kerner Commission. And I was appalled that they had a rather long witness list, and King was not on the list. I went through our executive director and various others, and I said, "How come Martin Luther King isn't on the witness list?" And they said, "Well, there are reasons."

Well, I know the reasons. The reasons were that the FBI was trashing him, and we dealt with the FBI. One of the things we were looking into was whether there was the racial.... They called it racial, but they weren't really racial. It's just that these were blacks who were doing the rioting, but they weren't rioting against whites. They were burning up their own neighborhoods. So they were urban riots, not race riots. They were racial but not race.

But there was a question in the investigation of it as to whether there were foreign influences at work, whether they were causing them. Because we still had the Cold War going on. So we had to deal with both the FBI and the CIA. I wasn't privy to what they got on that even though I was cleared for it. But if I wasn't cleared for that, I was cleared for a lot of other things. But I wasn't privy to it. All I knew was they didn't call him. I said, "Look, I'm your public relations man. I can only tell you that if you write a report and have not called Martin Luther King as a witness on matters of such vital concern to the black community, you'll be the laughingstock of the press. You'll be the laughing stock of Congress and everybody else."

Well, they accepted my feeling on it, and they called him as a witness. And all of our hearings were closed. Then we would put out summaries of the testimony. Afterward King asked me if I could set it up for him to talk to the press afterward. I said, "Sure." So I set it up for him to talk outside of the Executive Office Building. I told the press he would be

available. And he announced to them then--this was 1967 or '68. It was either the end of '67 or the very beginning of '68, I forget which; but he was going to have another March on Washington, another gigantic thing. And that's when they had that big.... What did they call that town? Not Shantytown. Some kind of a thing they set up, tents and shacks along the Mall.

But I was not a great fan of his. And I have no way of explaining it. I'm not saying I was right; I was probably wrong. But it's just the way I was. I don't know why I say that even; it's not relevant to anything whether I was a fan or not. But it has to do with what you were saying whether things were going to happen anyway. I don't think they were. I think that Lyndon Johnson, as adept as he was--and he had put through a civil rights bill as majority leader in the Senate when Eisenhower was president; it was the first one in God knows how many years, but that was a very modest bill. The thing that was significant was that it happened at all.

DAITCH: Right. Yes.

SPIVAK: And I know that what we pressed for in the Kerner Commission, and this is much later, was a voting rights bill and a housing bill. The voting rights bill was already taken care of.

DAITCH: That had already happened.

SPIVAK: That was already in there. Housing, fair housing, we pressed for that. "We," the commission pressed for it. I wasn't a member of the commission. But there were various things on Kennedy's legislative agenda other than civil rights that Johnson pushed through. Some of them, yes, I suppose he could have done. But I don't know that Kennedy could have done it either. He had Congress against him. And one thing that is fascinating--I kept it, I don't have it available, but I have it somewhere in my copious files that I can't find--a column by James Reston, Scotty Reston [James B. "Scotty" Reston], of the *New York Times* about how the intellectual community was against John Kennedy.

DAITCH: The intellectual community!

SPIVAK: The intellectual community. Now that has to come as a shock.

DAITCH: Yes!

SPIVAK: I didn't discover it 'til years later when I was working at the Democratic....

DAITCH: When did he write that?

SPIVAK: Well, in Kennedy's latter days.

DAITCH: Is that right?

SPIVAK: I didn't remember seeing the column when it was written. But I didn't discover it 'til years later, 1969 or '70, when I was working for the Democratic National Committee. I was going through some files in our library, and that clipping popped up at me. And I was shocked. Because that's what they accused Johnson of all the time. The intellectual community hated him, or didn't respect him. And here is Reston saying that Kennedy was facing that.

DAITCH: About Kennedy. I just can't believe that about Kennedy.

SPIVAK: Well, if I can find that clipping, I'll mail it to you.

DAITCH: Yes. That's interesting.

SPIVAK: But I'm going to look for it. I'll have to figure out how to mail it to you. But I'm going to look for it.

DAITCH: Yes, that's weird because I can't imagine what he's even basing that on.

SPIVAK: He based it on something plausible.

DAITCH: That's interesting. I don't know which intellectual community. Kennedy had his own intellectual community.

SPIVAK: Yes, yes. Well, it didn't include Republican intellectuals, of whom there probably were one or two.

DAITCH: Yes, that would have been the reference, I think. One of the things that I wanted to ask you about, and I added it to my little list of things after, when I was on the plane, and I just for reasons that I can't explain, I have failed to talk about this with enough people, I think, and that is the Peace Corps. Was that, you know, a big thing?

SPIVAK: Yes, I think it was. When that came up in the campaign, I frankly didn't think much of it. But a colleague of mine, an older colleague of mine who'd covered politics in the Senate longer than I had and worked with me at UPI, Bill Theis, T-H-E-I-S, [John William Theis], he said, "Peace Corps? That's a Hubert Humphrey idea." I said, "Okay. So?" But I remember writing that he proposed it. And it caught fire, it caught on. So the answer is yes, it was a big thing. It's still around. It's still here.

DAITCH: Oh, yes. I think it's a wonderful thing. But I wondered at the time, you know,

were there a lot of big press releases about it, and was it talked up?

SPIVAK: Well, it was during the campaign that it was first talked of. Then when it was implemented, when he was president, I'm sure there were. I'm sure there were backgrounders, I'm sure of all that. But I just don't remember it all.

But when you talk about big press releases, that set off another spark. When Kennedy decided he was going.... He came up with a big list of people to whom he was going to, for the first time, award the Presidential Medal of Freedom. I don't know how many press releases.... He was at Hyannis Port, and the White House press corps was at Hyannis Port. They brought us.... Of course we were at Hyannis at the Yachtsman man Hotel; that was our press headquarters. They brought us tons of background material: biographies of every honoree; the background of the medal, the history of it; the first time it's being awarded to people for their great achievements in all these walks of life and whatever. They gave us loads and loads of lead time to work on it.

So I wrote a story and had it all ready to go. I had already sent it. I don't know. It was on an embargoed basis so that everybody.... That is, you send it today, but you tell an editor to hold for release until a certain time, six a.m. the next morning or something like that. And I mentioned Larry Newman to you before, our stringer in Hyannis Port.

So I was meeting him that night for dinner. He said, "What's up?" And I told him about.... Well, the president's going to award a lot of medals tomorrow. We've been busy writing all about that. Presidential Medal of Freedom. He said, "What!?" I said, "Presidential Medal of Freedom. What's the problem?" He said, "Oh, that's the living end!" Whatever words he was using. He was irate. He didn't swear much, but he started swearing. He was devoted to John Kennedy. Devoted to him! Except he spied, observed from across the street. [Laughter] But he was literally devoted to him.

He said, "This is an outrage! I consider it an outrage and a personal insult." I asked him, "What's your problem, Larry? Do you think you should get the medal, too?" He said, "I have the medal." I said, "You have? What did you get the medal for?" He said, "This medal was awarded to me by Harry Truman. The medal was for bravery by civilians in time of war, and I got it because I was a correspondent on a bomber, and the crew was shot up and couldn't land the airplane, and I landed the airplane, and I never flew a plane before in my life." And he said, "Kennedy is cheapening my medal. I'm going to send my medal back." I said, "Back to whom, Truman?" He said, "No, I'm going to send it back to Kennedy and tell him what I think of him." I don't know whether he ever did or not, but you mentioned press releases. There were more press releases on that than I ever remember getting on any other subject.

DAITCH: He must have thought it was a good idea. And they still do it.

SPIVAK: They still do it. Oh, yes.

DAITCH: Well, your friend would have been very happy with the ongoing Medal of Freedom. Is that the fellow you showed me in the picture, his daughter, the little

girl you showed me, that was his....

SPIVAK: Yes. That's right. Yes, yes.

DAITCH: Okay. That was cute. Poor guy. We've talked about so many of these things already. Oh, I know something that you may or may not.... I've heard stories about this. Kennedy, I mean obviously he grew up wealthy, and he didn't really have an understanding of just money, just the ins and outs of everyday needing to have money on your person to do things; and that he was constantly asking people about how much do you make? and how much does this cost? trying to get a handle on it.

SPIVAK: Oh, yes. But this is part of intellectual curiosity, really. But I don't remember it happening. It didn't happen to me. But I remember once when I told him I was traveling someplace or other, this was during the Christmas party, and I said I was leaving shortly after that on a trip. And he and Jackie both kept telling me about all the wonderful places they had stayed in this place. I forget what trip it was or where I was going. Just a vacation, another bachelor vacation. And they were telling me about all these swanky joints that I couldn't have afforded to go to.

But I had heard that he never carried any money and always had to ask somebody for money, and I believe that. But I really don't have any personal experience of it or knowledge of it, no recollection of him asking anyone for money.

DAITCH: Yes, I had heard that from more than one person.

SPIVAK: Oh, I believe it, yes.

DAITCH: I just thought that was kind of funny.

SPIVAK: He was curious about everything.

DAITCH: Was he?

SPIVAK: Insatiable curiosity about all kinds of things.

DAITCH: Do you remember anything in particular that you remember chatting with him about?

SPIVAK: No. But it happened to me many times. I just don't remember any of the details.

DAITCH: Right, right.

SPIVAK: Because it would have just been in passing aboard the airplane or standing waiting for something, and I just don't remember.

DAITCH: Yes. Again, that's what people.... I've heard that a million times that he just constantly asked questions.

SPIVAK: Yes, that's true.

DAITCH: And in policy-making, too. Apparently he was very, very good at that, to bring his advisors in and ask them, just keep firing questions.

SPIVAK: Very clear from those tapes on the missile crisis, from the transcripts of the tapes.

DAITCH: Yes. And he was very quick to put things together. We talked a little bit about some of the women that were around, you know, Helen Thomas and.... But apparently, I mean it was two things: It was very much of a male enclave, and it was very much of a white enclave. And you talked about....

SPIVAK: There were a lot of women who covered the White House, mostly, though, covering what we call the East Wing, starting with Jackie. There weren't that many around during Mamie Eisenhower. But when there was a state dinner or formal event, they would be there to cover that event behind ropes and see who was there, whatever. But after Jacqueline and child and then children came in.... Well, was John born by that time? I don't remember. But he probably was. Yes, yes, because she had been pregnant with him just before the inauguration.

DAITCH: During the campaign, right.

SPIVAK: So I don't.... There were a lot of women covering, but not that many women covering the West Wing. Apologies to Martin Sheen, but the West Wing--or Aaron Sorkin. There were some very noted ones: May Craig from Maine. Doris Fleeson, a great lady, who was a columnist, formerly a reporter for the *New York Daily News* and other papers, but by then was a columnist. I don't remember if it was the *New York Times* or who it was for. Quite a woman. The incorrigible, in my mind, Sarah McClendon [Sarah Newcomb McClendon]. And some others. But there were relatively few, relatively few.

The *Washington Post*, I mentioned Marie Smith to you earlier. But the *Washington Post* had various women: Dorothy McCardle [Dorothy Bartlett McCardle], who was the wife of Carl McCardle [Carl W. McCardle], who was assistant secretary of state but in which administration? I don't remember, maybe it was Eisenhower. This is all a little fuzzy with me now. But anyway, Dorothy was there, another great woman, a wonderful, wonderful person. And others. Frances Lewine covered for the AP at the same time Helen did, again, starting out covering the family side and moving over to the news side. We needed the help. When I say "we," the AP needed her help. Two people weren't enough; three became necessary. And

the same with us. When Helen came over to our side, then they also covered the women's side. They did double duty.

DAITCH: Right. Were there any women who--again, this is something we could look up, but I have a feeling there's nothing to look up--any women in the administration? The one person that comes to mind is always Evelyn Lincoln who was kind of at the center of things to a certain extent.

SPIVAK: I'm trying to remember if there was a woman cabinet member, and I don't remember. It started out with Roosevelt and Frances Perkins.

DAITCH: Right, right.

SPIVAK: I don't remember that Truman had a woman cabinet member or whether Eisenhower did. I doubt it. But I don't.... Yes, there were women officials in the government, perhaps at the sub-cabinet level. But my memory's fuzzy on those.

DAITCH: No one memorable that you would have known.

SPIVAK: I don't remember any women in prominent spots at the White House. But I wouldn't put Evelyn Lincoln in that spot. She was his secretary. Well, that's not an executive position. There had to have been some. There had to have been. But I just don't remember who they would have been. Well, don't ever forget Dr. Janet Travell.

DAITCH: Right.

SPIVAK: But I don't remember others.

DAITCH: I don't think there were any way up there, but I just wondered if you remembered any that, you know, I've sort of overlooked in my wandering?

SPIVAK: Not like today. Even Bush [George W. Bush] has Condoleezza Rice, and there are other women who are in high slots there, a couple of whom, in my mind to our regret, like Gail Norton and some others. Condie Rice hasn't been doing too much for herself lately either.

DAITCH: No.

SPIVAK: But that takes nothing away from her intellectually. But there was not the equivalent. Clinton certainly brought them in, and Carter [James Earl "Jimmy" Carter], I guess, did. I don't remember. I don't remember if the first.... Well,

the first one was Elizabeth Dole [Elizabeth H. Dole]; she came to some prominence, whether that was with Reagan [Ronald W. Reagan] or George, elder, [George H. W. Bush], I don't know. With Nixon, I don't recall any prominent women. And blacks, even there it was a rarity. Now it's not the rarity that it used to be. To give Bush his due, the No. 2 man at the Justice Department is black, Richard Conley [James B. Comey, Jr. ?]. But there are various others. Then you have the great Supreme Court justice, Clarence Thomas, whom the elder Bush didn't appoint because of his race but because of his judicial talents.

DAITCH: Right, right. And we've all been duly impressed. [Laughter] But things are different now. I just wondered if there was any.... I did notice in a couple of speeches, unless they were doctored to reflect this, that Kennedy actually said, you know, bringing men and women of honor. But you didn't see him bringing any women in.

SPIVAK: He may have. I don't want to say he didn't. I just don't remember that very well. But things were different. The armed services, for example. Yes, they were integrated with blacks by Truman. But women didn't have very prominent roles in the armed services for quite a while after that. They do now. Now they become generals, they become admirals, and not just by being nurses. They have administrative roles.

Every year I write a show. It's a satirical show. It's sort of a military-industrial complex version of the Gridiron. This comes out of my having worked in the military-industrial complex. It's a show that's a spoof on the military-industrial complex. When I started writing this 20 years ago, we talked about how we must honor our men in the armed services. Now we say our men and women in the armed services and mean it.

DAITCH: Well, yes.

SPIVAK: Because you it's a fact.

DAITCH: Which is pretty exciting. I don't actually hold it against Kennedy that there was.... I think that was part of the times.

SPIVAK: It was totally part of the times. It was the times. It was the way things were back then. In those days, we're talking about reporters again, Helen hadn't gotten into the Press Club, the male Press Club. There was a Women's National Press Club. Helen hadn't gotten into the Gridiron Club. She later paved the way for women in both organizations. But time marches on, and progress marches on.

DAITCH: Yes, things change.

SPIVAK: God, how we fought against allowing women into the Men's Bar at the Press Club.

DAITCH: Did you!?

SPIVAK: Oh, how we fought against this.

DAITCH: Don't tell me you did! [Laughter]

SPIVAK: And so then when we merged the women's and men's Press Clubs, we had to change the name of it to the Members' Bar. And you know something? It didn't hurt a bit. [Laughter] There was no reason a woman couldn't be there.

DAITCH: Tradition!

SPIVAK: Yes, yes.

DAITCH: That's the only thing. People are held back by these weird traditions that are....

SPIVAK: Well, at the Gridiron Club their motto was: "Reporters are never present, women...." Oh, I'm sorry. "Ladies are always present." That was when it was a totally male event. Stag as could be. Well, now they say "Ladies are always present" because they are. Half the people there are women, I think. Half the members, I think, are women.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. I bet close to. Which is a great thing. I have two more questions that I wanted to ask you, and then if we have anything else.

SPIVAK: Okay.

DAITCH: One is that shortly before Kennedy was assassinated, he had done this conservation tour. Basically, apparently, it was more like a campaign tour, I think, to some Western states. And I'm told that that was where he hit on this issue that he was going to use to be sort of one of his main issues, and that was disarmament. Do you remember anything about that or going on that trip with him?

SPIVAK: No, I don't remember when it was. Now, I was gone for seven weeks prior to the assassination.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

SPIVAK: The UPI, which has since gone bankrupt several times over but not because of what they paid me, they didn't compensate my overtime with money; they compensated it with time. And I wound up with a seven-week vacation. I really had about nine weeks, but I could only afford seven weeks. I actually sailed to Europe on the *Queen Elizabeth*, the first *Queen Elizabeth*. Sailed back on another liner. So I arrived back in

my apartment in Washington on November 22, 1963.

Within a half hour of when I walked in the door, the phone rang, and it was my boss saying, "Thank God you're back. Don't unpack your bag. You have to go to Dallas." I said, "Why? What's in Dallas?" He said, "The president's just been shot there." Well, you knew no one joked about that. [BREAK] Well, I was talking about how my boss told me that the president had been shot. So he said he would call me back with details. They were putting a press plane together. He would call me with details of how soon to get there, Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. The next call I got was: You can unpack. You're not going to Dallas. But you've got to get out to Andrews Air Force Base very quickly because *Air Force One's* coming back with Kennedy and Johnson aboard, etc.

So I don't know anything about seven weeks prior to the assassination, if that's when he made the conservation tour. I don't remember being on it if it happened before then. I just don't remember.

DAITCH: Yes, I think it would have been during that period probably when you were vacationing. But the second question I was going to ask you was about your experience of the assassination. I didn't know if you had been in Dallas.

SPIVAK: No, I've always thanked my lucky stars that I wasn't. Not that I'd be averse to covering a great story, aside from the tragedy of it. But Merriman Smith, whom I've mentioned many times as a great reporter and senior....

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 3]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 3]

SPIVAK: Merriman was in Dallas, and he was riding in the press car, as we called it, the wire service press car except there was more than one wire service. So you had a telephone company.... It was a car the telephone company provided. I guess it was Southwestern Bell. I don't remember.

Malcolm Kilduff was the press officer on duty. Pierre wasn't there. He was flying to Japan. I don't know where Andy was, probably at the track. He had a proclivity for that. Sorry, Andy. Merriman was in the front seat which is where the telephone was. Now, there were no cellular phones back then. This was a radio telephone. Then in the back seat was Jack Bell [Jack L. Bell] of the AP and Bob Clark [Robert Clark], who was then with the *Washington Star*, I believe; and he was a pool person for the rest of the press.

Merriman heard the shots. He immediately picked up that phone. And I think in those days you couldn't dial it. You had to have an operator connect you. But anyway, he got through to the UPI Dallas Bureau, and he phoned in probably--I don't know if he phoned in a flash, which is the highest degree of news value, or a bulletin, which is the usual high degree. It's to alert editors who are following the wire services. They hear bells ring out on the

teletype machine. You don't have teletype machines anymore. But in those days you had those old clanging teletype machines with the bells.

(Just parenthetically, I was a copy boy at the *Philadelphia Bulletin* April 12, 1945, when Roosevelt died, and I heard those bells go ding-ding-ding-ding, 16 bells, four, four, four, four, on the INS machine. There was a little thing that said, "FDR dead." And I ran it over to our news editor, and he took it, and he spiked it. Our last edition had already gone to press. I said, "Roosevelt's dead!" He said, "Ah, don't believe that INS. That's Hearst. I used to work for Hearst. Somebody probably is pulling a joke." But two minutes later the AP came through with their flash. And suddenly this guy went as white as your blouse, raced over to our managing editor, who, for the one and only time I ever heard it in my life, picked up the phone with the direct line to the press room, I mean where the presses were, and said, "Stop the presses!" I never heard it before or after. But anyway, that's parenthetical.)

What made me start telling? Oh, about Merriman phoning his office, giving them the story. And then slowly repeating it, having them repeat back to him. And Poor Jack Bell was dying 10,000 deaths in the back seat because he couldn't get to the phone. One phone in that car. And no one knew what had happened other than that there was a terrible emergency, and the motorcade was racing someplace. They didn't know where. It was the hospital obviously, Parkland Hospital.

Well, the reason I've always thanked my lucky stars is I wouldn't have known they were gunshots. Oh, I spent a little time in the Army. When they allowed me to, I fired a weapon in training. Never fired one in anger or heard one fired in anger. And Merriman's hobby was guns. He used to go out to the target range with the Secret Service, and in those days we could be friends, and with the White House uniformed police. They were not part of the Secret Service then. And he would do target practice with them. He knew gun fire. He had a gun collection. Nineteen seventy he put one of the guns in his mouth and shot himself in the head, poor guy. But in any event, Merriman won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of that. And if I'd been there, I wouldn't have gotten a Pulitzer Prize.

DAITCH: You wouldn't have known what you were hearing so quickly?

SPIVAK: I wouldn't have had the presence of mind. I hate to sound overly modest, but I'm sure it's true, that I wouldn't have had the presence of mind to pick up the phone and say that the motorcade had been diverted. I'd have waited until we got to where we were going to find out what was happening. Merriman, a great reporter, had the presence of mind to do that. Jack Bell wouldn't have either, I might add, if he hadn't heard Merriman Smith say what he said. So the answer is I was not in Dallas, and I've been grateful for it.

I picked up the coverage when the plane landed at Andrews Air Force Base, and I stayed with that coverage 'til the burial. I was there when the body arrived at the White House. I was there.... And, you know, I can't describe it, but I vividly remember it. I'm supposed to be able to put things in words. But I just remember the hearse coming up. I remember the hearse coming up the driveway to the north entrance of the White House, Pennsylvania Avenue side, and going in there where the body was going to lie in state.

I remember many of the events during that time leading up to the funeral. I don't know if you remember the funeral, but the dignitaries wore--this is Jackie's decision, I suppose, I think it was. But she more or less wrote the scenario for it. But the dignitaries wore frock coats. As formal as could be.

And I hate to laugh about a solemn event like this, but Merriman was positioned to march in the procession going to St. Matthew's Cathedral for the funeral, for the Funeral Mass. And here is this solemn, as solemn as could be. Well, Merriman was a communications nut, and he had inaugurated the use of a walkie-talkie. Remember now, we're in 1963; we didn't have cellular phones. We didn't have CB, Citizens Band. He had a walkie-talkie that was the size of one of those World War II walkie-talkies in a great big khaki bag on his shoulder that weighed a ton. And in the office was another walkie-talkie. Why the heck he had to have that, we don't know. It was all on live television. [Laughter] But he was a nut about this.

Again, parenthetically, once Helen Thomas, when she was out on one of the boats following Kennedy, and usually Merriman went out on the fishing boat because he liked it; he enjoyed it. Helen hated it like I hated it. Not because of the privacy; she didn't care about the privacy. She just hated being on the boat. She called him.... And Merriman would always call himself "UPI-1 to UPI-2" if you had one of these monstrous walkie-talkies wherever you were, taking down what he said was happening. And Helen made the terrible mistake of saying, "UPI-1 to UPI-2," and Merriman said, "Helen, you are UPI-2, I am UPI-1." [Laughter]

Well, anyway, there was Merriman. He went in, and he covered inside St. Matthew's Cathedral. Again, it was all on live television. But still and all, he probably had some little nuggets that he was able to provide. My vantage point was at the cemetery, there on the hillside facing the grave. We had a direct line telephone there, and I just kept dictating. I knew it was on live television. But I just kept dictating because we were doing a running story. And I don't know what I dictated. I just said what's going on, what's happening. And then putting into words what the people in the office could see on television. But putting it into words. Then the typist was taking it down. And then it was going to an editor who was polishing it up and putting it in with everything else.

Years later I talked to the young lady I had been dictating to, and she said, "You know, I'll never forget how you broke down in tears." And I said, "What tears? I didn't break down in tears." She said, "You did to." I said, "When?" She said, "Sometime during that burial ceremony at the grave you suddenly started crying." And then it hit me. It happened during the fly-over. I guess it was *Air Force One* that flew over, but there were fighter planes that flew over, too. Whatever. It happened during that time. And I did choke up. I didn't break down. But I choked up, and I suddenly remembered that. I'd forgotten that for years. But I didn't cover Dallas, but I did cover the heck out of it in Washington. There were a lot of things to cover in Washington.

DAITCH: I've never talked to anybody that didn't choke up or just break down.

SPIVAK: Oh, God! You heard.... Well, bagpipes make me cry anyway, and she had

bagpipes there. It was quite a staging. To her credit.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

SPIVAK: I think it was wonderfully done, wonderfully done.

DAITCH: You know, I've seen it on film. I obviously couldn't remember it. I wasn't old enough when it happened. But seen the pictures and other descriptions and things. I think she did a wonderful job with it. It was the right note through the whole thing.

SPIVAK: Yes, that famous picture of young John Kennedy saluting, giving a salute when the casket was going by. The picture happened because Helen, who was standing outside St. Matthew's Cathedral, Helen Thomas, probably heard Jackie saying to her son to salute. And Helen nudged the UPI photographer who was next to her.

DAITCH: Is that right?

SPIVAK: Who took the picture of young John-John saluting.

DAITCH: Wow!

SPIVAK: That was thanks to Helen, though.

DAITCH: Oh, yes, that's wonderful.

SPIVAK: She was a brilliant, and she is a brilliant, news woman.

DAITCH: Oh, she is, and she never mentioned that to me. And I wouldn't have thought to ask her.

SPIVAK: The photographer got a prize for it.

DAITCH: Yes, yes, and she got nothing.

SPIVAK: Well, he took the picture.

DAITCH: Well, it's a wonderful, wonderful image--the pathos. Do you remember anything like.... I mean you were saying your reportage was just describing what people were seeing on television. But there are things that you might have....

SPIVAK: Oh, it has to be put into words to go into a wire service report, newspaper, or whatever.

DAITCH: And there would have been things that you wouldn't see on television. I mean you wouldn't necessarily get the little sounds and the smells. It was probably cold. I don't know.

SPIVAK: I have no recollection. I have a recollection of how cold it was at the inauguration. That I remember as vividly as anything in my life. During the inaugural parade I had to stand in front of that reviewing stand for hours, hours on end. And I was as frozen as anybody could be. Luckily, I had equipped myself, but you couldn't equip yourself... I mean I'm talking about several pairs of long-john underwear and several pairs of socks. But how much can you protect yourself against all the freezing weather?

DAITCH: Well, and just standing still, not moving, you get cold.

SPIVAK: At that time we had to stand in front of the stand. When Johnson was sworn in four years later, they allowed the press to be up there in the reviewing stand next to where he was. That is, not in the same stand where he was, but the stand next to where he was.

DAITCH: Alongside.

SPIVAK: Yes.

DAITCH: Probably better.

SPIVAK: But it was also about as cold.

DAITCH: Yes, those January inaugurations.

SPIVAK: I don't know why we don't do everything in the spring.

DAITCH: It seems more appropriate.

SPIVAK: Including our Cara--my show. I told you this organization I write the show for. It's called the Military Order of the Carabao. The carabao being a beast of burden, a slothful beast of burden of the Philippines. And we always have ours the first Saturday in February. But I keep begging them, please, please do it in the springtime when it won't snow and have ice storms or whatever. They say, "No, it's got to be now." It's the anniversary of the Philippine Insurrection. [Laughter]

DAITCH: Well, it doesn't seem right to me. Either that, or they could come down here and do it, which would probably be okay.

SPIVAK: That would be much better yet.

DAITCH: Well, anyway, I think we should probably stop unless.... Do you have anything that crossed your mind that you meant to say?

SPIVAK: Nothing that we haven't really covered, no.

DAITCH: I think we've done an outstanding job. Well, you've done an outstanding job.

SPIVAK: I'll make you a copy of this story.

DAITCH: I would love to have a copy of that.

SPIVAK: And also I'll find that Reston column and send you that.

DAITCH: Great. I dug this card out for you. Oh, yes, and this is the David Wise, "What It's Like to Cover the President."

SPIVAK: Yes, he later went on to write books about the U-2 and the CIA, and he's still considered one of the expert book writers about intelligence. Now, how do I address this to you? Vicki Daitch, Oral Historian, John F. Kennedy Library.

DAITCH: Right. It's just Columbia Point. Is that on there?

SPIVAK: Yes, Columbia Point, Boston, Massachusetts, etc.

DAITCH: Yes. You can do that or I can give you my home address. They usually forward me things, you know, if something comes to my attention.

SPIVAK: Okay. Whichever you prefer.

DAITCH: That would be great.

[END OF TAPE #3]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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